

SHRI SHRINATHJI



Inspired by : Shri Nikunjalata Betiji
Published by : Shri Gusainji Charitable Trust

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-: Inspired by :-

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-: Written by :-

Smt. Neeta Rajesh Mehta

-: Published by :-

Shri Gusainji Charitable Trust

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THE STORY OF SHRINATHJI

OH ! SHRINATHJI, LORD OF MY LIFE
GRANT ME GRACE THAT I MAY WRITE
ABOUT YOU AND YOUR INFINITENESS,
YOUR FROLICS AND YOUR PASTIMES
DIVINE, LOVE AND YOUR DIVINE MIGHT.

THIS, I PRAY DAY AND NIGHT
IN MY HEART AND IN MY EYES
YOUR BEAUTIFUL FORM FOREVER

RESIDE

I dedicate this and every word and thought, every expression
(of this work) at the Lotus feet of Shri Krishna in his
"Govardhandharan" form. Without His infinite grace describing
His divine form would not have been possible....

- Neeta

Remembering My dear Father Shri Rasiklal Tulsidas Maniar who
Imbided in me this deep rooted unrelenting faith in my beloved
Shrinathji.

PREFACE

I had always wanted to generate a creation dedicated to Shrinathji in tune with the global awareness and communication that brings knowledge and information for today's generation. I therefore take great pride in presenting this book 'Shrinathji' which has been like a dream come true for me. This beautiful form of Shri Krishna, has enticed and attracted thousands of people, both, 'Pushti Marga and non Pushti Marga Hindus from all over the world. People from every corner of the globe visit Nathdwara to get the darshan of Shrinathji, some of them out of love and devotion, the others with desires to realize their unfulfilled dreams, yet most of them do not know who Shrinathji is what is the system of darshan and worship in the temple, and why are things different from the systems of other Hindu temples.

The idea in presenting this book was basically to give information at large to people who are curious about Shrinathji and the system followed in the Nathdwara temple. An attempt here is made to cover the various aspects of Shrinathji from the time of his appearance to the present day. The resplendence, the opulence of the celebrations of festivals, all explained in a nutshell are adapted to inform the reader more about Shrinathji.

Another very important reason for presenting this book is that the younger generation which is seeking knowledge and information in English can read and know at least the basics connected to Shrinathji of course a lot of literature has already been published, but the author has carefully tried in this book to cover practically every aspect of Shrinathji in a very comprehensive way and I sincerely hope that the younger generation will find this book, a useful medium to develop and deepen their faith in the Lord.

It is also with great pride and pleasure that I once again present Smt. Neeta Rajesh Mehta as the writer of this beautiful work. She already is the author of our former publications Prabhucharan Gusainji Shri Vitthalnathji, Mahaprabhu Shri Vallabh (a picture story) and co-written Jagadguru Shrimad Vallabhacharya. She is also a gifted poetess, penning lyrics about Shrinathji has always been a passion with her, but when I asked her to create a book, she was a little sceptical, but my complete confidence in her ability as a writer inspired her to create this work, She is a person who is dear to me and I believe she understands me well enough because in creating this work, she has given everything that I had dreamt this book should be. The creation of this book has been like a dream project for her because of her great love and unrelenting faith in Shrinathji. She has worked hard and diligently for a long time on this book making it not only informative but also aesthetic, written by her this book seems more like a work of the heart than of the thought. Her style of writing is simple and lucid, flowing and at times lyrical making it readable for people of all ages. I shower all my heart's blessings on her with the hope that she will dedicate her artistic skills to creating a lot more works in this field.

I also heartily bless Smt. Asha Lalit Mehta and Ratanshibhai Jivanjibhai Raja Parivar. For their co-operation and support in the publication of this work.

I sincerely hope this book will be read and appreciated in every Vaishnav home and even beyond in establishing the glory and divine presence of the power of Shrinathji.

- Nikunjalata Betiji

FOREWORD

The form and beauty of Shrinathji has intrigued and enchanted me ever since I was a child. It was more than thirty five years ago, since my first visit to Nathdwara, the pull and the attraction has been so strong that I have been going there practically more than once every year. This attraction had been a mystery to me and I had never been able to fathom why I kept on returning for His darshan. Every time I was in the Lord's presence I was overwhelmed and was overcome by a strange emotion, a force very strong which I had never quite understood but I could only say that I was totally drawn towards the magnetic beauty of Shrinathji.

In trying to fathom out this emotion, I discovered very gradually that I kept on returning time and again in the lord's presence purely because of His grace and I began to feel blessed. The love for Shri Krishna a dormant force in my heart gradually started blossoming. This love made me want to understand a lot of things about the form, about the temple, about the sewa and about Shrinathji. In fact it was chiefly this force of love which made me want to know about **Shri Vallabhacharyaji**, his philosophy and about **Pushti Marg** itself.

I had already begun to write small lyrics and bhajans describing Shrinathji and his immense grace. It was then that I met **Param Puja Shri Nikunjalata Betiji** who is one of the illustrious descendants of Shri Vallabhacharyaji in the present times, She inspired me to release an audio cassette of my lyrics. Even at this stage I had not dreamt of writing a book on Shrinathji.

In a meeting once with **Jiji** (as we call Shri Nikunjalata Betiji with love and reverence) she suggested I write a book describing Shrinathji's form for readers who do not follow Gujarati or Hind and are more at home with the English Language. I was a little terrified at the idea, for never in my wildest dreams I had ever thought of describing every aspect of Shrinathji in such details. But she, out of her love for me made me take up what I thought was an impossible task. She also promised to help me with explanations and references wherever necessary, a promise which she always kept. She not only inspired me in this work but helped me wherever necessary for which I shall always remain grateful.

This work would never have been completed had it not been for Shrinathji's infinite grace; for who can describe Him without His will and His grace ? The words may have come from my pen but the thoughts, the expressions and the capacity to pen those thoughts are entirely His. Everything good and appreciative about this work should be known to be His grace and every fault I accept and acknowledge as my own human incapability in describing one who is not only beautiful beyond every description but divine, beyond everything divine.

I only put down my humble prayers at His feet asking to be graced in spite of my short comings in describing His divinity. As he resides in every heart and every being I only hope that he understands my sentiment and knows and accepts me to be one of His very own.

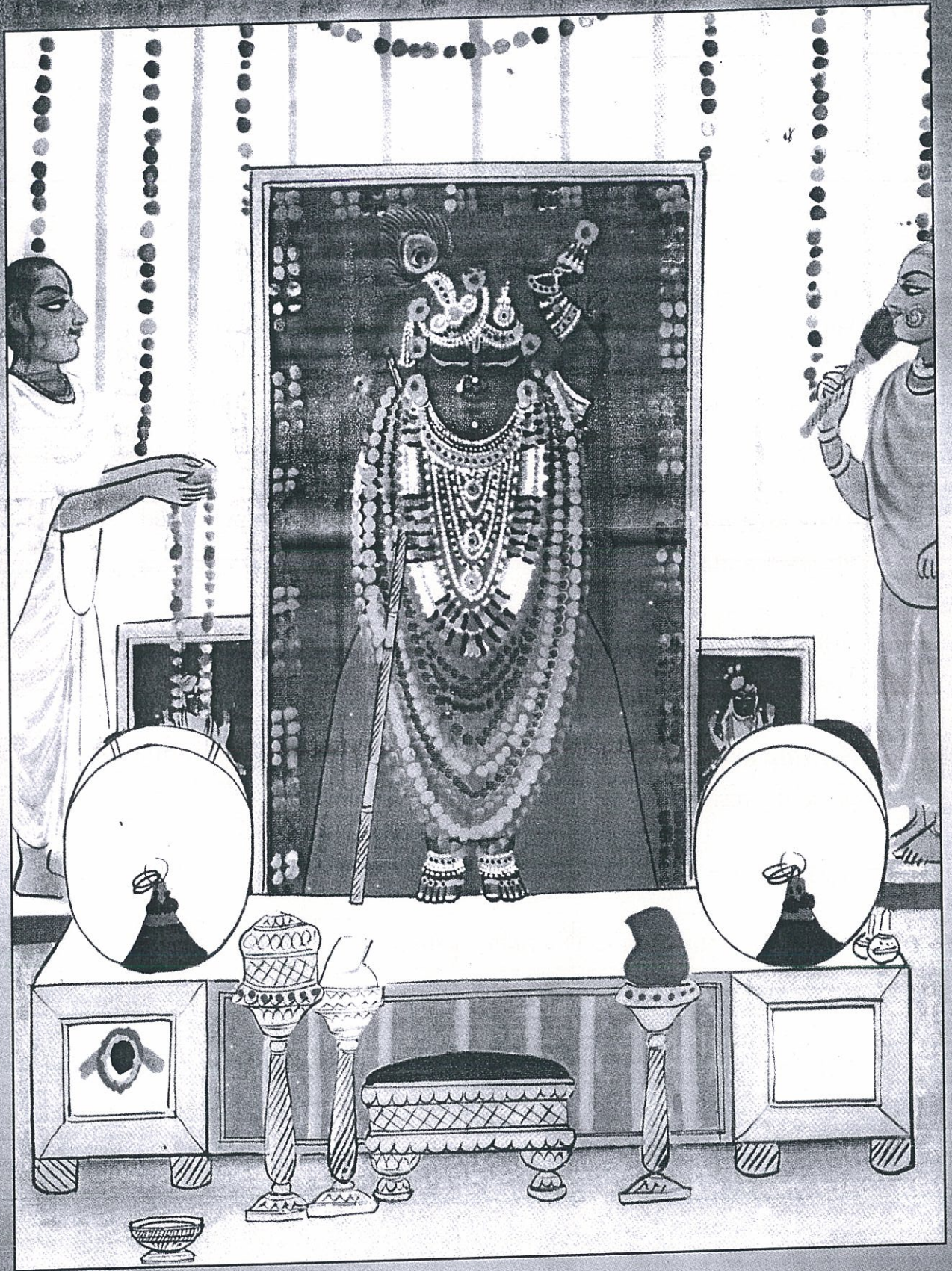
With sincere thanks and respect to Shri Nikunjata Jiji, I greet all my readers....

- **Jai Shri Krishna**
- **Neeta Rajesh Mehta**

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(Shrinathji Adorning Pavitras in Shraavan)

INTRODUCTION

Every year thousands of people throng the little town of Nathdwara and have a glimpse and pay their respects at the Lotus feet of Shrinathji. Amongst these thousands, most of them do not have the faintest idea of what the form of Shrinathji actually is, nor do they understand why the sanctum closes and opens for darshan so many times, why some people rush to get the glimpse of Shrinathji at so many different times in one day when elsewhere the temples are open for a greater part of the day and one glimpse or darshan would be enough. The Shrinathji factor continues to intrigue thousands of people even today; especially to people who come from abroad; and to once visit Shrinathji while they are in India. It is for people like these, that an attempt has been made to describe the form, the temple and the darshan of Shrinathji.

In the *Giriraj Khand* of the *Garg Samhita* it has been said :

“येन रूपेण कृष्णेन धृतो गोवर्धनो गिरिः

तद्रूपं विद्यते तत्र राजन शृङ्गार मण्डले ॥

The form in which Shri Krishna lifted the Govardhan Hill, that form will appear again in *Srhringara Mandala*.

Shringara Mandala described here is the *Vrajbhoomi*. (Vraj the area in and around Mathura the land when Shri Krishna spent his childhood) centuries ago, it was predicted in our Scriptures, that the beautiful form of Shri Krishna when he lifted the Govardhan Hill, which was called by many names like *Shri Govardhandhari*, *Shri Girirajdharan* etc. this form will again manifest itself in Shringara Mandala (Vraj) True to these words the form manifested itself in the caverns of Giriraj Hills in the seventeenth century and out of our immense love we call that form Shrinathji the short form of Shri Govardhan Nathji.

After staying in the Giriraj for one hundred and seventy seven years the Lord has blessed Mewad with His divine presence and today we see Him gracing His devotees with love in the temple town of Nathdwara.

A lot of literature in poetry as well as prose has been written about Shrinathji. An attempt however, is being made here towards a more simplistic approach to understand the form, the Sewa, the temple routine and above all His grace so that even a child who goes to Nathdwara can have a better understanding of the temple's busy schedule. Also dealt with, here in this book are a few names and stories of Shrinathji's beloved devotees, those chosen ones with whom He has played, frolicked, talked and has loved after

manifesting Himself in this form. The list of his devotees is endless, these few names are examples to understand the way in which the Lord chose to grace His devotees, for the main virtues or **Guna** of Shrinathji are grace and love.

The temple and the Sewa routine described here is not in its minutest detail for it would take volumes to describe the immaculate intricacies of both, but is a wider view of the temple and its routine, enough to understand a few fundamentals about the Lord.

Also in a glimpse, the story of Shri Vallabhacharya's birth has been given so that the form of both Shrinathji and Shri Vallabh may be understood to be one.

It is therefore sincerely hoped that this work in spite of its many short comings would to some extent help to give its readers a lot of insight and understanding about Shrinathji.

- Neeta

THE BACKGROUND

Hinduism is a religion, based not just on the stories from great scriptures or mythology. It is rather a religion of spiritual experiences passed on from one generation to the next from times immemorial. Great names human and divine alike are interlaced with our lives in such a way that we find them to be a part of our daily routine today.

For ages our culture has been nurtured by the sagas of Rama and Krishna. They have been interwoven with our lives and every aspect of our lives social, moral, economic or scientific find their roots way back in their great legends. Mythology and scriptures are not just stories of folklore but they are tales that have spiritual experiences, at their very foundations. With every story and every name, there is an underlying experience of a divine principle.

Scriptures claim that God power, or supreme power, the Creator and maintainer of this universe which in common Hindu term is known as '**Parabrahma Parmatma**' has manifested itself as different incarnations in this universe, many times either partially or in its entirety. Shri Krishna is one such name synonymous with this concept of Parabrahma. While other incarnations (avatars) like Narasimha, Parashurama, Waman etc. are also the incarnations of the same Parabrahma, yet no other name shines more brightly in the galaxy of divine stars as Shri Krishna. Shri Krishna's life as we know from the story shows Him to be a totality of Divine God power manifesting itself completely in human form. He is what we call "Poorna Parashottam" or absolutely supreme. Shri Krishna's personality impresses and interests people of all ages from a child of two years or an adult of ninety.

The Supreme has manifested itself many times, in various places and in many forms but perhaps its most beautiful and magnetically attractive form could easily be said to be that of Shri Krishna. Never in the past could there be anyone or any form as captivating as Shri Krishna and never will there be one in the future for eons to come; the name Krishna itself denotes 'attraction'.

Shri Krishna in His human form showed us the way to live an ideal life. His may have been a completely contrasting personality, yet His life was ideal in every way. The gentle child kicking its legs in Yashoda's lap rising to kill Putana and Tarnavrata. The lover of Radha and the Gopis performing the divine Rasalila, leaving them to weep alone in Brindavan while he proceeds to Mathura and responds to the call of duty. The greatest ambassador of peace in Hastinapur desperately trying to prevent the Mahabharata war inspiring Arjuna to rise and fight for the sake of Dharma on the battlefields of Kurukshetra.

A pure Sanyasi (ascetic) at heart living amidst the luxuries in the golden city of Dwarka. His is a colourful personality. Every person in today's world even in this age can find answers to life's various queries from the life of Shri Krishna.

If we were to shut our eyes for a moment and think about Shri Krishna or his form, what would we see ? Some would see Shri Krishna as a very young child, barely a year and a half old, clad in yellow clothes, tiny body, sweet faced, crawling around his mother Yashoda, his mouth smeared with butter. Some would see him as a grown-up lad about 7 to 8 yrs old leaning against a cow, peacock feathers in his crown, flute on his lips and the melody beckoning Radha to come to him. Yet others can see a mature personality, handsome in face, concentrating on teaching a despondent Arjuna the highest ideologies and philosophies of Karma on the battle field of Kurukshetra. A strong and powerful leader, eyes radiant and gentle voice persuading Arjuna to do his duty.

Yet there is one form of Shri Krishna that is particularly very beautiful and very attractive and that is Shri Krishna in his Govardhandharan form, as he lifted the Govardhan hills to protect His dear Vrajvasis from the calamity caused by Indra.

To know about Shrinathji's form in its proper perspective it is therefore necessary to have a brief glimpse of Shri Krishna's life, Though not in great detail we attempt here to outline his life with emphasis on one incident particularly which shall give us a better understanding of Shri Krishna as he appeared in the form of Shrinathji.

Broadly divided Shri Krishna's life can fall into three stages :- His childhood days in Vrajbhoomi i.e. Gokul and Brindavan where he lived for exactly 11 years and 52 days, His life in Mathura where He killed the mighty tyrant Kamsa and his life as Dwarkadheesh (The Emperor of Dwarka) which also includes his role in the Mahabharata war and His form as Yogeshwar when he taught the principles of Gita to Arjuna.

In the good old days of Dwapar Yuga, in the Saraswat Kalpa (one of the four ages described in the scriptures accounting the past ages), some five to six thousand years ago, on the banks of river Yamuna, in the fertile plains of North India was the city of Mathura. Mathura and its adjoining areas on and across Yamuna (commonly known Vraj today) were inhabited by the powerful people of the Yadava clan; headed by a powerful demonic king called Kams, whose tyrannies towards the people especially Rishis (religious thinkers) was so great that to subdue him, the God Power or the Supreme Brahma had to manifest itself in its total form. This was one of the reasons for Shri Krishna to manifest Himself.

Born in Mathura, Shri Krishna was immediately moved to Gokul, at the house of Nandji; The head of the cowherd clan of Gokul. Here totally surrounded by the love, affection and attention of his parents, Shri Krishna spent the early days of His childhood. The life of the people of Gokul was never the same again. The Lord had come to them with all His glories and power. He was the subject of their love. Shri Krishna spread total bliss and ecstasy amongst these simple but loving people.

Even as a child He demonstrated His extraordinary powers. He killed Putana and Tarnavrata when He was barely a few days old. Then followed a series of other slaying s of the demons which the wicked Kamsa consistently sent to kill this child. Aghasura, Bakasura, Keshi, Denukasura, Pralambasura etc. were among the few that Krishna killed while he lived in Brindavan, he even subdued the mighty serpent Kaliya and sent him away to settle in a distant land. Thus his mission of subduing the forces of evil and relieving the earth of their wickedness started from His early childhood.

Shri Krishna, charming in face and attractive in form endeared himself to everyone in Gokul. He was every one's favourite. Every child, every adult in fact, every person in Vraj was totally in love with Shri Krishna to such an extent that life of the entire village of Gokul revolved around him. The Gopis especially, (the women folk of Vraj) just adored him. He was the very source of their life, and their life centred around Krishna's daily routine.

When Krishna was about six years old, He learned to look after the cows and became Gopal. He also learnt to play the flute. It was this flute that enamored the people of Vraj. Just a few divine notes from his flute would captivate not only the Gopis but the entire flora and fauna of the land. His young cowherd friends would gather around him and listen to him play the music and the Gopi's would run to Him as though their very life depended on it. Days passed and Shri Krishna frolicked in Vraj, performing His divine leelas, which were a source of ecstasy to the simple Vrajwasis.

Once it so happened that preparations were being made by the Vrajwasis under the leadership of Nandji for the annual pooja and yagna (sacrifice) of Indra (who in Indian mythology is the King of the demi Gods) or the god of rain. Krishna though knowing it, innocently asked His father about the grand preparations being made, and was told that these were preparations to appease Indra by worshipping him so that the land would be blessed with proper rainfall affecting their agriculture and cattle rearing, to keep them prosperous, failing which Indra would be furious and curse them by insufficient rains and other such calamities. Krishna in all innocence listened very patiently and said "Our

prosperity and happiness dear father, does not depend on pleasing Indra but on our own karma. Also our fields and our cows are protected and provided for by our friend and protector the Govardhan mountains. Let us worship nature and protect our environment and perform a puja of the Govardhan mountains". Appealing as He was Nandji believed in Shri Krishna's argument and taking his word to be final, called upon the Vrajwasis to perform the Govardhan puja.

The next day, Kartik-Sud-Ekam (the first day of the Hindu New Year), Krishna led the joyous Vrajwasis to the foothills of the Govardhan hills. Everyone had prepared something and brought as an offering to the Govardhan hills. Shri Krishna performed the puja with the help of the Vrajwasis and they made a huge mountain of their offerings and called it "Annakot". Extending His divine yogic powers Krishna doubled His form, one form performing the puja and the other within the mountain accepting the offerings of the Vrajwasis. The simple Vrajwasis were happy to see the their Govardhan actually accepting their offerings whereas Indra had never been known to accept it, though they worshipped him for so, many years.

Indra on the other had come to know that Krishna had prevented the Vrajwasis from performing his Puja and forgetting the reality about Shri Krishna, was furious and decided to teach the Vrajwasis a lesson by showing his might. He summoned all the forces of cyclonic rains to descend upon Vraj. Cyclonic winds blew, thunder and lighting were rampant in the skies as Indra complacent by his own vanity and fury watched the plight of the people.

The Vrajwasis as per their habit when any calamity occurred, turned towards Shri Krishna seeking refuge in Him. Shri Krishna, knowing Indra's vanity to be the cause of this havoc, calmed them and said "Do not fear my dear Vrajwasis, come to me, the Govardhan will protect everyone do not worry". So Saying, with the help of His powers He lifted the Govardhan on the little finger of his left hand. The Vrajwasis came under its shelter as though under a huge umbrella For seven days and nights Indra tried desperately to destroy the Vrajwasis but under Shri Krishna's protection not one person or animal was harmed Shri Krishna had protected every being that had taken refuge in Him.

Indra soon realized his mistake in failing to recognize Shri Krishna in his true form. He stopped the deluge, came to Vraj and humbly fell at the feet to Shri Krishna asking to be forgiven, his pride totally subdued. Shri Krishna placed Govardhan back in its place. The Vrajwasis hailed him as Shri Girirajdharan or Govardhandharan (The one who lifted the Giriraj or the Govardhan Hills). By subduing Indra's pride He was hailed as Devdaman or Indradaman.

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(Shri Krishna Lifting the Govardhan Mountain)

His divine leelas or pastimes continued throughout His entire lifetime. He performed Rasalila, went to Mathura, killed Kamsa, freed his parents, fought great demonic forces like those of Jarasandha and Shishupal etc. sided with the righteous Pandavas, protected them and stood by them during their difficult times, acted as a messenger of peace trying to avert the great war between Kauravas and Pandavas failing which, He became Arjunas charioteer on the battle field, taught him the principles of Bhagwad Gita, showed him His divine Universal form. It is only his Govardhandharan form which is to be carefully considered for the present for it is this form which is the form of our "SHRINATHJI".

The Krishna of Dwapar Yuga comes back to us in Kalyug, (the most difficult and testing of all times). This is the form which we see today as Shrinathji. Shrinathji therefore is not just an image or a shrine but a form of Shri Krishna who has chosen to manifest Himself for the sake of the love of his devotees. He has taken this form to protect beings that truly belong to Him and love Him. He has come to us in this form to test our love and faith in him. When we look at Shrinathji today we know it should be felt that we are with Shri Krishna himself, admiring his captivating beauty and form.

The form of Shrinathji whose darshan we seek in Mewad in Rajasthan today is the living, breathing, the most beautiful form of Shri Krishna that is reciprocating our love and faith. The story, the anecdotes given here are therefore examples of how the Lord reciprocates our love. They are stories that prove that Shrinathji is not just an idol or shrine carved out of stone but the Lord himself who has chosen to live between us for the sake of our love.

CHAPTER - 1

The Appearance

It was that period in the history of Hindustan when one Muslim ruler after the other tried to make himself the master of this land and establish his foothold on the throne of Delhi, a period of general chaos and confusion with no stable government at the centre, independent governors ruling over small territories, gradually establishing control over the whole of the Gangetic valley. At this point in the history of India, we go back, to trace the manifestation of **Shrinathji** and his journey towards Mewad.

The area in Uttar Pradesh in North India on the banks of River Yamuna now famous as **Mathura Mandal**, an area of about 250 kilometers surrounding the present city of Mathura which is believed to be the birth place of Shri Krishna and was then and now known as "Braj Bhoomi" or "Vraj" is the centre stage of the story that is about to unfold here.

At the turbulent times of India's history in the sacred "Vraj" on and around the banks of Yamuna there is a quiet little village called **Aanyor** situated at the foot of Govardhan hills. This little village was content in its own peace and serenity, dwelling in its own picturesque surrounding, quiet and undisturbed in the shadows of the Giriraj hills, acres of lush green fields, surrounding ponds, wilderness with its own flora and fauna. The people living here - **Vrajwasis** or inhabitants of Vraj were mainly farmers and cowherds, a contented lot, satisfied with their lives nothing unusual happening to create a slightest ripple in their daily routine. Indian history may have witnessed major upheavals at this time but this town in its own quietness away from huge cities was unaffected. It was the village of Aanyor that Shrinathji chose to perform his divine Leelas.

Amongst the villagers of Aanyor, was one Mangalya Pande a cowherd who owned many cows which would be sent out to pastures in areas around the hills under the supervision of young lad called Mansukha. The boy was honest and hardworking and performed his duties correctly; but soon Pande noticed something strange-something he could not understand; one of his cows, a black one called **Dhumar** gave lesser milk than the usual quantity she always gave, he was slightly perturbed and even suspected Mansukha of stealing the milk, upon confrontation Mansukha pleaded innocence and promised to observe the cow and understand the matter. The next day when the cattle were taken out to pasture Mansukha closely watched Dhumar. Exactly at a particular time in the afternoons and evenings leaving the other cows behind, Dhumar would quietly slip away, climb atop the hills, and at a particular spot release her milk.

Mansukha observed this for a few days, after which he reported the entire incident to his master. A surprised and intrigued Pande gathered the villagers and told them this entire episode of the cow's peculiar behavior. Amongst them was an elderly man who observed that a cow would behave like this only if there was some hidden treasure or a sacred deity in that place.

Early next morning the villagers therefore set out to go atop the hills and find out for themselves as to what or who was present at that particular spot that made the cow release her milk. They quietly followed Dhumar and after she released the milk they approached the spot and slowly shifted the boulder which partly covered the cavern and what do they see ! **A raised left hand !** They were about to further uncover the cavern when a mysteriously divine voice was heard. The voice sweetly and very clearly commanded ***I am Devdaman - the Lord, Protector and Lover of my devotees. Do not try to shift me for I will emerge from here when it is my will.***

The villagers were ecstatic; the Lord had manifested Himself and appeared in their land and they worshipped the divine left hand with all the paraphernalia that was available to them, offering milk, curd and butter from their humble houses everyday. This worship of the left hand continued for many years. This wonderful incident occurred in Vikram Samvat 1470 on the fifth day of the Hindu month of Shravan known as ***Shravan Sud Panchami or Naag Paanchmi.***

A lot of time passed, say about seventy years or so, while the people continued to worship the left hand that had appeared. An incident similar to the earlier one occurred again, this time with the cow of a villager called Sadu Pande. When the intrigued villagers followed the cow atop the hill, they were sure that the deity whose left hand had only appeared in the past would manifest itself and show itself totally to everyone.

While the villagers anticipated something miraculous to take place, the atmosphere, the air around showed its own pleasantness and auspicious omens. The harsh sunlight gave way to a pleasant cool cloud cover which showered tiny droplets of cool rain water making the air cool and fragrant, a mild thunder and a crack of lightning. People could barely understand the meaning of all this but when they reached and neared the spot where the lifted left hand had manifested itself. They shifted the boulder and were faced with a blinding streak of effulgence and within its brightness a face of a young seven year old boy, complexion of a rain cloud, strands of hair around the face hair tied up in a knot on top of the head, saffron tilak on his forehead, clad in white dhoti, looking beautiful beyond comprehension of any human mind, eyes radiating pure love as they looked round.

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Shri Krishna who had manifested Himself in the Saraswat (Age calculated by celestial
calendars to decide the manifestation of God) Kalpa so long ago had reappeared on earth
to bless His devotees and grace His chosen ones as promised according to the writings of
the ancient Hindu scriptures. It seemed that the entire universe was celebrating His
reappearance. The fortunate Vrajwasis were full of joy for this happening was beyond
their wildest dreams, the Lord had come to them, to be amongst them, and they would not
trade this happiness for any treasures of the world. They bathed him with milk as a simple
offering of their puja and offered milk and curd as a simple Bhog. Soon after they heard a
hauntingly melodious voice, "I am Devdaman, the Lord and protector of the universe, I
am also known as Naagdaman and Indraman, and I shall remain at this place till it is my
will and later emerge from here when the time comes". This day was Vikram Samvat 1535,
Chaitra Vad Ekadashi (The eleventh day of the dark half of Chaitra).

Exactly on the same day.....

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In the forest area of Champaran (former Madhya Pradesh now in Chhatisgarh) a
young Velnadu Telang Brahmin couple Laxman Bhatt and his wife Illamagaru were hurriedly
journeying to reach the safety of a nearby town. Traveling from Kashi (Banaras) to reach
their hometown Kanakarwad in Andhra Pradesh and, separated from their fellow travelers,
they wanted to cross the forest before night. The wife, about to be a mother was ill and
uncomfortable but it would be almost two months before she would deliver. She was fatigued
and weak and could barely walk any further. Soon they came to a lonely deserted spot on
the banks of river Mahanadi. The place was surrounded by lovely scented magnolias
(Champa). It was here that Illamagaru, no longer being able to take the strain of the journey,
delivered prematurely, a tiny baby boy. The child appeared weak and did not move. In
the darkness of the night, thinking the child to be stillborn, lamenting her own tragedy,
wrapped the child in a cloth torn from her own sari and laid it to rest in the hollow of a
huge tree; covering it with a lot of dry leaves to protect it from being devoured by wild
animals of the forest, bathed in the river and narrated the incident to her husband.

Lamenting their fate, taking it to be God's will they moved ahead in search of shelter
in a nearby town. Walking a little further they reached the town of Chaudanagar. The head
of the town was Laxman Bhatt's disciple and soon arranged for their stay in the town. That
night Shri Krishna appeared in Laxman Bhatt's dream and told him that He had manifested
Himself in their family as promised to his ancestors, but they had failed to recognize Him
and left Him in the forest; Laxman Bhatt told his wife about this dream and as soon as they
could, set out for the forest. On approaching the deserted spot Illamagaru witnessed
something amazingly strange. Huge flames of fire surrounded a circular platform on which

was lying her child playing and kicking with its tiny arms and legs. Illamagaru recognized her child but hesitated to go near it as it was surrounded by flames of fire. Laxman Bhatt asked his wife to go ahead and pick up the child as the flames would not harm her because of the divinity of the child. Illamagaru gladly picked up the child, happy to hold her son in her arms, the couple showered on him all the love and affection that they could. The lord had finally been born into their family as promised to their ancestors (that he would manifest Himself in this family after the completion of a hundred **Soma Yagnas**).

This day was Chaitra Vad Ekadashi, Sunday; Vikram Samvat 1535, the day Dev Daman Shrinathji's face was seen in the Govardhan Hills.

The child that had been born of Illamagaru and Laxman Bhatt was Shri Vallabhacharyaji the last of the great acharyas or religious reformers of that time. Along with other great Acharyas like Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya etc. He strived greatly to reform and uplift the Hindu - Vedic religion. He was the greatest exponent of Bhakti or devotion and his entire life was dedicated to Krishna Bhakti. His theory of **Shuddhadvait Brahmapada** was indeed revolutionary as it was different from the other branches existent at that time and on the basis of which He founded the **Pushti Marga** or the path of grace. His theory of Shuddhadvait and Pushti Marg were strongly supported by the writings of Shrimad Bhagvat, Vedas and Shrutis and Shrimad Bhagavat Gita. In order to spread the message of Krishna Bhakti and promote Pushti Marg he journeyed thrice through the length and breadth of the country, teaching Shrimad Bhagvat and the ways of devotion towards Shri Krishna.

It was during one such journey, while he was in Jharkhand that Shri Krishna appeared in his dream and commanded "I have manifested myself in the Govardhan Hills and wish to emerge from the cavern; build a small temple and seat me there and worship and serve me with all the love in your heart, I am waiting for you".

On hearing these words Shri Vallabhacharyaji headed for Vraj Bhoomi and reached Aanyor and heard the entire story of the divine manifestation from Sadu Pande.

Meanwhile Shrinathji had begun his divine leelas...(Pastimes)

Naro was a pretty eight year old daughter of Sadu Pande and with her friend often played the game of hide and seek around the caverns of Giriraj Hills. Once while such a game was in progress Devdaman(one of the many names of Shrinathji) taking the form of a young boy approached her and said, "Naro amongst the many cows that your father has, there is one called Dhumar she is very dear to me, bring me her milk everyday in the



(Pratham Milan - Shri Vallabhacharyaji & Shrinathji)

mornings and evenings". Naro was very happy and she herself took the milk twice daily for her Devdaman; sometime if she was late, Devdaman would call out her name and ask for his share of milk. Devdaman Shrinathaji had thus begun performing his leelas and was showering grace on His chosen devotees. The Vrajwasis (local people of Vraj) loved Him in a very special way; they attended to all His needs and offered Him whatever He demanded. Naro soon became His closest friend and would play with Him around the caverns of the hills from where He had manifested Himself.

It was while these leelas of Shrinathji were in progress that Shri Vallabhacharyaji reached the house of Sadu Pande in Aanyor. After his arrival, he was contemplating how he would fulfill Shrinathji's wish, when he heard a melodious voice that filled his heart with happiness. The voice was demanding his pot of milk from Naro to which Naro replied, "Bawa (a term of endearment in local dialect) can't you see there is an important guest in the house ? I am just about to get your milk." So saying, she rushed out of the house carrying the pot of milk, Shri Vallabhacharyaji delightedly watched her as she rushed up the Govardhan Hills where her Devdaman was waiting for her. After some time when Naro returned, having fed the milk to Devdaman. Shri Vallabhacharya asked her if there was any milk left in the pot, the few drops that were there were then taken by him as the PRASAD (remnants of food left after a divine offering).

The next morning (Shravan Sud Teras) (13th day of bright half of Sharavan) Shri Vallabhacharyaji along with his few followers and few Vrajwasis along with Sadu Pande's family decide to go atop the Hill for it was understood to be Shrinathji's will to emerge from the caverns and bless everyone with His darshan. It was perhaps the most ecstatic moment of Shri Vallabh's life; he would soon be face to face with Shrinathji. Slowly he started his ascent atop the hill but Shrinathji could no longer contain Himself and emerging out of the cavern, and before Shri Vallabh could reach Him, with sheer joy of a beloved, embraced him. It was a rare occurrence and a rare sight, the people around were blessed and fortunate to witness something of such unprecedented bliss. No one could take their eyes off the beautiful form of Shrinathji clad in orange dhoti and red uperna (sash) strings of tiny pearls around his neck, a paag or a local style headgear with peacock feathers and body the hue of rain clouds and a smile that mesmerized everyone present. Eyes conveyed what no words could convey and described the ecstasy of both Shri Vallabh and Shrinathji.

Later, according to Shrinathji's wishes a small temple was built and the Vrajwasis under the guidance of Shri Vallabhacharyaji officially seated Devdaman Shrinathji or Shri Govardhan Nathji (the Lord of the Govardhan Hills) and began the seva or worship routine according to the method of Pushti Marga as shown by Shri Vallabhacharyaji. This routine

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was initiated keeping in mind the highest principles of unconditional devotion and love.

Amongst the Vrajwasis was a man called Ramdas Chauhan, a great devotee of Shri Krishna, Shri Vallabhacharyaji deputed him with the seva of Shrinathji. Ramdas had no idea about the Pushti Marga method of seva but Shri Vallabh taught him the basic principles of the routine and asked him to serve Shrinathji according to His own will; the prime focus being the comfort and happiness of Shrinathji at all times. Then, by Shrinathji's will Shri Vallabh gifted him with a pair of golden Anklets (adornment for the feet), After which Shrinathji asked him for a cow, for He was a cowherd and loved cows dearly. Shri Vallabh immediately presented a cow to Shrinathji; thereafter the local Vrajwasis like Sadu Pande gifted cows and very soon the temple had a **Gaushala** (shed where cows are kept and cared for) of its own. (Shri Krishna is the eternal **Gopal or Govind** a great lover, care taker and protector of the cows).

SHRINATHJI WANTS A BIGGER TEMPLE

(Puranmall Kshatriya)

In a town called Ambala in Punjab lived a Vaishnav called Puranmall Kshatriya a rich trader and an ardent devotee of Shri Krishna. One night Shri Krishna appeared in his dreams and said ***I have manifested myself in the Govardhan Hills by the name of Devdaman Shrinathji, at present I am seated in a small temple but wish for you to have a bigger temple built for me.***

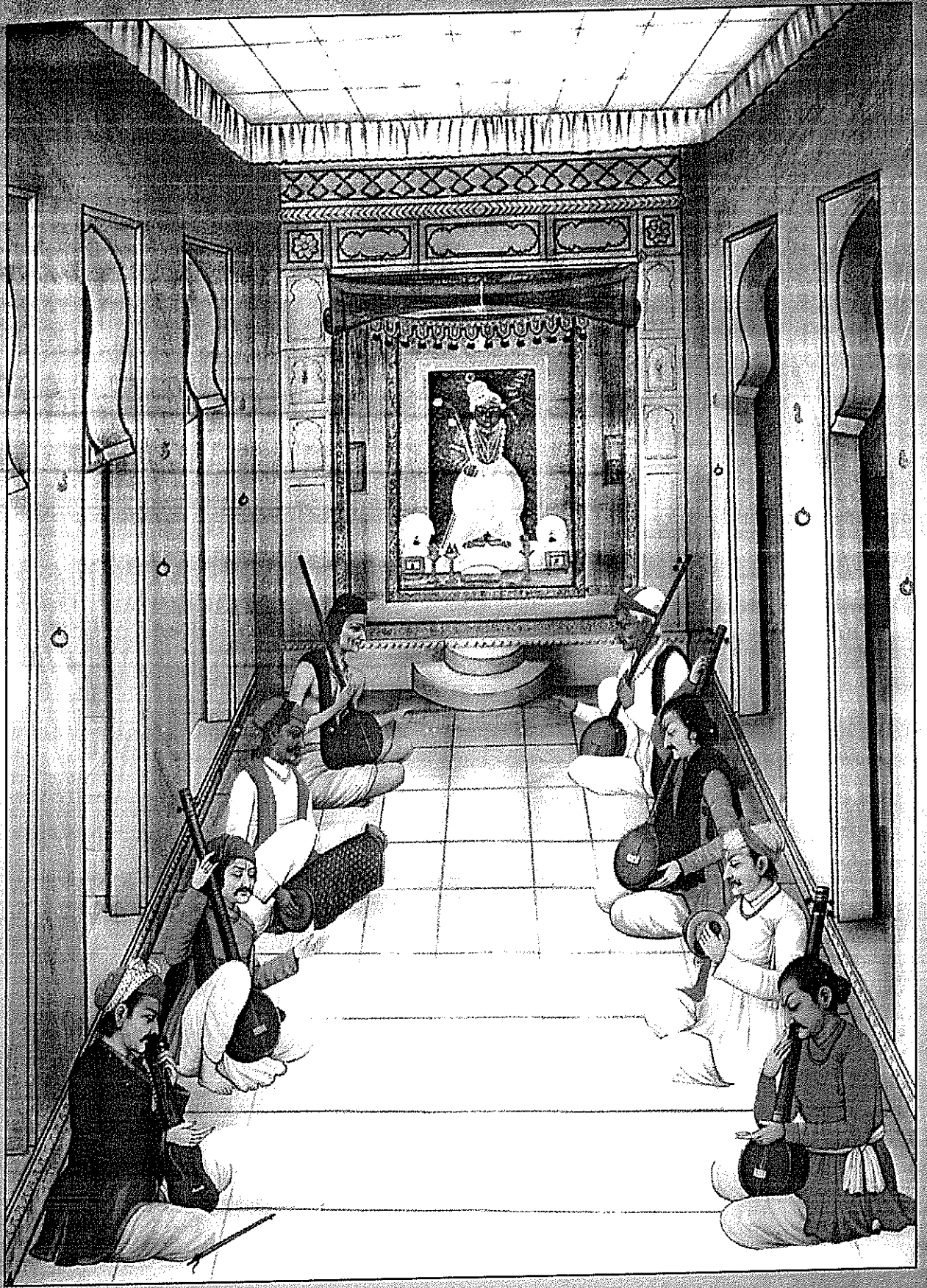
When Puranmall awoke the next morning, he was very anxious to get the darshan of Devdaman who had so appeared in his dreams. Gathering all his wealth, he headed straight for Vraj. One look at Shrinathji, Puranmall lost his heart to Him. He was anxious to start construction of the new temple, but was told that only the disciples of Shri Vallabhacharyaji and the followers of Pushti Marga could serve Shrinathji. At that time, Shri Vallabhacharyaji was on one of his missionary tours. Shrinathji appeared in his dreams and asked him to return to Vraj, accept Puranmall as his disciple and order him to build a bigger temple. Accordingly Shri Vallabhacharyaji returned, inculcated Puranmall into Pushti Marga by giving him the Brahma Sambandh and accepting his services towards Shrinathji, asked him to begin the construction of a new temple.

Very soon the construction of the new temple began but halfway through, Puranmall's wealth was spent. He asked Shri Vallabh's permission to earn more so that he could have enough to finish the temple according to Shrinathji's wishes. With Shrinathji's grace he returned to Vraj with enough wealth and had the temple completed. On Vaishakh Sud Teej in Vikram Samvat 1576 Shrinathji was seated in the new temple with seven banners (Dhwajas) fluttering over it.

Shrinathji was very pleased with Puranmall and Shri Vallabh showered his immense grace on him and fulfilled all his wishes, as he was amongst few of the chosen devotees with whom the Lord could express His wishes and ask him for whatever He desired.

Having seated Shrinathji in the new temple, Shri Vallabhacharyaji re-organized a systematic seva of Shrinathji which was continued even after him by his sons Shri Gopinathji and Shri Vitthalnathji (Shri Gusainji). In fact Shri Vitthalnathji enhanced and expanded the seva of Shrinathji and organized a very splendid routine according to the wishes of Shrinathji Himself.

Shri Krishna is and has always been associated with dance and music, even in His manifestation as Shrinathji, this love for music and dance was very prominent as it was an



(Ashta Chhap Kirtankars)

integral part of his divine Leelas and the Seva routine which plays an important part in Pushti Marga even today. When the humble Vrajwasis would play music, Shrinathji would appear in their houses and listen to them. Keeping this in mind, Shri Vitthalnathji appointed eight poet (kirtankaars) musicians who would compose lyrics and sing them melodiously in the temple in front of Shrinathji for his pleasure. These came to be known as the **Ashta Chhap** Kirtankars or eight poet musicians who were often befriended by Shrinathji and witnessed his divine Leelas that He, out of his grace, performed with his Chosen devotees. They gave a rich treasure trove of poems, devotional lyrics or kirtans penning their experiences with Shrinathji and celebrating the bliss of the sublime as they surmounted the highest peaks of Bhakti. Shrinathji loved them and graced them for they were his very own. Even the Bhog and the Shringar of the seva was organized properly as Shri Vallabhacharyaji had always emphasized that only the best in thought, word, deed and material should be offered to Shrinathji and used for the purposes of His seva.

Shrinathji was greatly pleased by the way His devotees loved him and cared for Him. He in return loved these innocent Vrajwasis and intermixed with them, blessing them with experiences incomprehensible by human reason. He appeared in their humble dwellings, played with them, ate their humble food, and listened to the music they played often dancing to their melodies. It was a similar performance of those divine Leelas of Krishna Avtaar as Shrinathji bestowed total bliss upon His Chosen ones. Amongst those were local Vrajwasi cowherd boys and girls who were befriended by him and played with them in and around the areas surrounding the Govardhan Hills.

CHAPTER - 2

The Chosen Ones

The sole reason for Shri Krishna's manifestation as Shrinathji in the present age of Kalyug (present age from among the four ages described in the scriptures) is to bless His devotees and reciprocation of the love which they felt for Him. By knowing these devotees we can understand a lot more about Shrinathji's Leelas and the purpose of his manifestation. These villagers in Vraj were simple, pure at heart and humble people for whom Devdaman was everything. They delighted in His love and tried to make Him comfortable and loved him unconditionally. Here were simplest of souls who were the epitome of love and devotion at its highest and were the greatest of Krishna Bhaktas (devotees) of all times.

Along with these simple Vrajwasis there were kings, princesses even Muslims, devotees belonging to every class and caste of Indian society who were inculcated into Pushti Marga by Shri Vallabhacharyaji or his successors after him. Shrinathji reciprocated the love of his devotees with immense grace.

Shri Krishna Poorna Purshottam, Parmatma, the Brahma described and sung about by the Vedas, chose to manifest Himself in this beautiful form as Shri Govardhandharan Shrinathji to grace and bless His devotees to reciprocate the love of those who loved Him and lived for Him. Here we get the idea of the way in which He performed His Leelas, enjoying the love and affection of His devotees while He Himself in His Childlike form, reciprocated their love and rewarded their devotion.

RANGEEL (PARÉ)

Rangeel was an orphan Brahmin boy of Aanyor. This simple innocent boy came to the temple everyday for the darshan, his father had been looking after the cows and was a follower of Shri Gusainji (Shri Vitthalnathji) who took a liking for the boy and would often call him and talk to him. As he grew up he was greatly anxious to have a seva in his own home. He would perform odd jobs in the temple and with the share of food material that he would receive from the temple, cooked two portions, one for himself and one for the Swaroop the form of Shrinathji (deity) that he worshipped as paré (the name of his swaroop which was given coincidentally by Shri Gusainji in haste) Shrinathji reciprocated his love and devotion and came to him and shared the humble meal that was prepared by him.

Khemo (Kshama Gujri), a simple Vrajwasi girl lived in one of the villages around Govardhan Hills. She would go around different villages selling curd and yogurt. One day

while on her rounds in the area of Daan-Ghati, (area around Shri Giriraj Hills) Devdaman Shrinathji stopped her, demanding the curd from her pots. Khemo however passed by without relenting to His demands but in just one glance had lost her heart to Him. Shrinathji appeared in her mother-in-law's dream and told her about meeting Khemo, who then gladly gave him the curd from her pot and Shrinathji knowing her love for Him would often re appear on her way and eat the curd offered by her to His hearts content.

PATHO - GUJRI

There was another Vrajwasi girl called Patho Gujri, who lived in a village called Gantholi. Patho was deeply devoted to Shrinathji and with her friends would often go to the temple and offer milk, curd and butter. Her intense love found its anchor when Shrinathji decided to grace her and reciprocate that love.

Often Patho carried lunch in the hot afternoon for her son who worked in the fields on the outskirts of the village. This meal generally consisted of roti (an Indian Bread), Vegetable, curd or buttermilk. One such hot afternoon, when she was walking towards the fields, she felt the basket of food being lifted from her head. She turned around to see a mischievous Devdaman, His eyes twinkling and smiling away opening the basket and enjoying a meal of roti and curd, she was entranced and enchanted by the captivating form of a seven year old boy. She was ecstatic and completely taken in by His presence. Taking just two rotis, He placed the rest of the food in Patho's hand and said "Promise to come and feed me your rotis again tomorrow". This was the kind of love Shrinathji graced His devotees with. Patho was spellbound, her heart totally devoted to Him.

RUPA - THE GATE KEEPER

Rupa was a gatekeeper of Sinh Pole (the lion gate) one of the many gates of the temple, he was an ardent devotee of Shrinathji and would vigilantly guard the gates with a lot of love and care. One night Shrinathji appeared in front of Rupa and said **Rupa, I am hungry, get me some food.** Rupa went to Shri Gusainji, woke him up and told him about the unusual request of Shrinathji.

Often Govinddas sang in front of Shrinathji during the evenings, having sung the kirtans in his melodious classical ragas he would go home and the temple gates would close and Rupa would take up his post outside the gate. During the night he would sing a few Kirtans aloud. Once Govinddas heard him sing and forbade him from singing aloud as his hoarse voice would disturb Shrinathji in his sleep. Rupa stopped singing but was sad because this singing was his only way of expressing the love and devotion he felt for Shrinathji. Next morning, when Shri Gusainji went into the temple he saw Shrinathji's

sleepless eyes, upon asking he was told that since Rupa did not sing that night. He could not sleep well. Though Rupa had a rough voice the love of his heart was soothing enough to put him to sleep. Shri Gusainji ordered Govinddas to never forbid Rupa from singing at night. Shri Gusainji marveled at how the love of a humble guard was reciprocated by Shrinathji.

SHYAM PAKHAWAJI AND LALITA

In Ganthgoli village, nearby, lived Shyam Pakhawaji and his daughter Lalita. Both were excellent musicians. Shyam played the Pakhawaj (a kind of percussion drum) and Lalita excelled at the art of playing the Beena (a kind of stringed instrument like the sitar). Both were great devotees of Shrinathji. Often they would play music till late night and Shrinathji who was a great lover of music would appear in their modest dwelling, listen to their music and enjoy it, and the nights would turn into early dawn before their music stopped. Shri Gusainji would often observe the sore sleepless eyes of Shrinathji and upon asking would be told that he had been to Shyam's house to hear their music. Thereafter Shri Gusainji invited both of them to play music in the temple of Shrinathji's pleasure and Soordasji would sing melodious Kirtans. They were given a special position by His grace and received His darshan everyday.

BHAKTA KAVI SOORDAS

Soordas one of the greatest poets of hindi literature in India, was a great Krishna devotee. Though blind, his devotion and love of God were strong and his faith was unflinching. His inner vision or mind's eye as we call it was so awakened by the strength of his devotion and love of Shri Krishna that though he actually could not see Him, he would describe exactly the way in which Shrinathji was adorned in His Shringar. His poetry sang the beauty and grace and the divine Leelas of Shrinathji and his mellifluous voice added greatly to the grandeur of the poetry that he composed. Shrinathji would often appear in the form of a young cowherd boy, sit in front of Soordas and enjoy his melodious kirtans. Soordas described his experiences of this divine love and therefore given some of the best compositions Indian literature has ever known.

ALI KHAN PATHAN AND PEERJADI

Ali Khan Pathan was one of the officers in the administration of Emperor Akbar, he lived in a area called Mahavan near Gokul. He had a beautiful daughter named Peerjadi, who was a very accomplished dancer. She was devoted to Shrinathji and became a follower of Shri Gusainji. When she danced, Shrinathji would appear in her house and watch her dance. Peerjadi's life was fulfilled, often she would be so ecstatic while dancing that Shrinathji would accompany her by giving the beats or even dance a few steps with her.

RASKHAN PATHAN

Raskhan was also a muslim and was amongst the most blessed devotees of Shrinathji. He just happened to see a picture of Shrinathji somewhere and his heart awakened to the greatest of devotions. He came to Vraj in the quest for the one whose picture he had seen, and Shrinathji blessed him with his darshan, soon he became a follower of Shri Gusainji. His devotion found expression in poetry and lyrics of unsurpassed beauty and is ranked amongst the greatest in Indian literature today comparable only to that of Soordas etc.

ROOP MANJARI

In Gwalior there lived a Kshatriya family, who were the followers of Shri Gusainji. Roop Manjari was a beautiful girl born into this family; she was a great devotee of Shrinathji who excelled in playing the game of CHOPAD (a game similar to chess). One night Shrinathji appeared before her expressing his desire to play chess with her and then often sat with her and played the game till the early hours of dawn.

HARJI GWAAL

The paddy fields around the temple in Vraj belonged to the temple and were guarded by two young boys. One of them was called Harji, who was a devotee of Shrinathji and did his work diligently and lovingly. Once, his friend, leaving Harji to guard the field, went for lunch and did not return for a long time. Harji was very hungry, but at the same time did not wish to leave the fields unguarded. Hours passed and his friend did not return. It was nearly evening and he could not bear his hunger any longer, sadly looking towards the temple he expressed his plight to Shrinathji, who was so moved by his situation, that taking food from his own share in the temple, appeared before Harji and fed him with his own hands.

GOVIND SWAMI

Govindswami or Govinddas was one of the eight poet musicians chosen by Shri Gusainji to sing kirtans in the temple. He was a great Krishna devotee whose love found expression in the beautiful compositions and the melodious voice with which he sang them. Shrinathji befriended him and would often enjoy riding on his back or even a game of hide and seek. He loved Govindswami as a friend and enjoyed teasing him by cheating at the game in his own childish pranks, thus expressing His pleasure by enjoying the most ordinary games with His devotees.



(Accepting Suthan-Patka Shringar as Requested by Taj Bibi)

TAJ BIBI

Taj Bibi was one of the many queens of Emperor Akbar, a beautiful Punjabi Hindu woman and a favourite with the king. Birbal's daughter Shobha and a Hindu jeweller's daughter Kalavati were her close friends. Both of them were Vaishnavas, devotees of Shrinathji and influenced her greatly, and soon she became a follower of Shri Gunsainji.

Taj Bibi too gradually became greatly attracted and attached to Shrinathji, and as days passed, her devotion increased with great intensity. Shrinathji was greatly pleased by her devotion, would often appear in her palace in Agra and play chess with her in the afternoons. Once when he did not grant her darshan for many days, she could not bear the intense pangs of separation and it began to affect her health. Akbar soon became aware of her situation and decided to take her to Vraj for the darshan in the temple.

It was the time of Holi (the festival of colours) and Shrinathji revelled in this festival, playing Holi and enjoying the colours and the fun of playing with his devotees. In her ecstasy Taj sang lovely compositions describing this Leela of Shrinathji, losing her senses, reaching out to put colour on him, her arms outstretched, she rushed towards him. At this very moment her soul merged into the form of Shrinathji, entering into his realm while her lifeless body fell into Kalavati's arms. Shrinathji had blessed, loved and accepted his devotee completely.

FOR THE SAKE OF AJAB KUNVAR

The names of Shrinathji's devotees dealt with here are few and a lot of them have not been mentioned or the story of Shrinathji would end up in volumes. However the story of Shrinathji can never be complete without a thorough understanding of the devotion and love of Ajab Kunvar born in one of the princely families of Medta. (a district in Rajasthan) The Mughals on one end were constantly trying to attach Rajasthan under its consolidated territory and understanding that Chittodgarh would always be their target. Maharana Uday Singh shifted his capital into Mewad to a city he called Udaipur. Its neighbouring state Medta under Dudaji Rathod was also striving to maintain its independence. Dudaji was a great military general and an ardent Krishna devotee. His elder son Viramdev had a son called Jaisingh and daughters called Veera and Ajab. His second son Ratansingh had a daughter the legendary Meerabai a great devotee of Shri Krishna, a poetess and a singer par excellence. It is Ajab Kunvari however who is the centre of our story as it moves further.

Ajab was married to the second son, Udaisingh of Mewad, on becoming a widow at a very early age; she shifted her residence to Sinhad, a small township surrounded by the Aravalli Hills, about 45 kms. from Udaipur. Living a lonely life, she devoted herself to Krishna on the footsteps of her cousin Meera and gradually her devotion increased in depth and intensity.

Once it so happened that Shri Gusainji, on his way back from Dwarka passed from Sinhad. On seeing the place, he predicted that Shrinathji would one day leave Vraj and settle down in this place. Ajab Kunvar happened to get His darshan and being attracted to his personality, became his follower and took to the ways of Pushti Marga, learnt the ways of Sewa and lived her life accordingly the zeal, and the intensity of her love for Shri Krishna grew with each passing day.

Going to Vraj, to get that darshan of Shrinathji, she lost herself totally to Him and her love grew deeper when she returned to Sinhad she could not bear to be separated from Him. He would appear in her house in Sinhad (Rajasthan) every afternoon talk to her, even play chess with her. Once it so happened that Shrinathji did not appear before her for days, the separation she felt was so acute, that she lost her senses and fell into a stupor, Shrinathji knowing the condition of His devotee appeared before her, awakened her and brought her to her senses, she was ecstatic on seeing him but when He started to return she held His hand saying "I shall never let you go". Upon which Shrinathji promised "I cannot leave Vraj in Shri Gusainji's lifetime but will later come to you and live in this very house where you have so held me; your house shall be my temple, I will never leave this place, and will appear before you and grant you darshan everyday. "This then was the promise Shrinathji had given to His dearest devotee for which he left his beloved Giriraj Hills, Vraj Bhoomi and traveled all the way to Rajasthan to settle in an unknown land, of different location, amongst different people.

And this is how the next few pages of this book will unfold, narrating the journey of Shrinathji.

CHAPTER - 3

SHIRNATHJI COMES TO MEWAD - THE JOURNEY

Shri Krishna in the Dwapar Yug, (one of the four ages as described in the Scriptures) appeared in Vraj believed to be His eternal abode, reappeared as Shrinathji in the same area in the Govardhan Hills, had His temple built there, enjoyed the devotion of his loved ones and yet today we go to Nathdwara, a small town in Sinhad region of Rajasthan for His Darshan, and to know this reason for leaving Vraj Bhoomi we have to again turn back a few pages in the annals of history

Since two hundred and fifty years of his manifestation in Vraj, the Mughals were practically the masters of the whole of Northern Hindustan. Rajasthan was perhaps the only region which had never succumbed to might of the Mughals. From Akbar to Shah Jahan, either through war or diplomacy, they tried to subdue the Rajputs in Rajasthan, but under great heroes like Rana Sangramsinh etc Rajasthan always managed to be independent. Under such circumstances, Rana Udaisingh even shifted his capital from Chittodgadh to Udaipur. Historical treatises say that when Aurangzeb became the king, anti Hindu feelings were at their highest. He converted people to Islam at point of his sword and vent his fanaticism by destroying Hindu temples systematically, as they were centres of people's faith and religious feelings. Soon the temples in Vraj became his target as Vraj Bhoomi was the centre of Hindu devotionism since ancient times, His force had pillaged Brindaban and Mathura and was totally intent on destroying the temple atop the Govardhan Hills. He thus sent one of his army chiefs to the temple. the temple administrator in order to prevent the destruction of the temple, using a little dipomacy, showed him the patronizing letters and the grants (parwanas), of Aurangzeb's predecessors which permitted free and unstricted worship of Shrinathji in the temple, seeing which the chief decided against destroying the temple, for the time being, but to show his powers, he ordered that the deity in the temple show some miracle to prove its divine presence. Shrinathji, through one of his old devotees Gangabai, conveyed His wishes to Bade Dauji (who was they the goswami deseasant of Shri Vitthalnathji) expressed that he was in no mood to perform any miracle but instead would be happy to leave the temple and seek His residence somewhere else; as the time for Him to leave Vraj had come. However the main reason for Shrinathji's leaving Vraj was never historical for neither histroy, nor political power, nor military upheavals could intervene when divine power was at play. Forever bound to the affections of his devotees. He had known that the time to fulfill His promise to Ajab Kunvar had come and Aurangzeb's military arbitrarism was only an alibi to his shifting his temple

from Vraj to Mewad. Therefore in the year 1726, Shrinathji, in all secrecy left His abode in the Govardhan Hills, started on a long journey, towards a new destination leaving behind His Vraj Bhoomi. Led by Shri Dauji, He had a small group of His devotees who took care of His needs and understood His wishes. Gangabai, His devotee, led the way as His chariot followed her. She was very special now as He expressed His wishes directly to her and communicated with the others through her. The journey of Shrinathji and His small band of devotees had begun, traveling in total secrecy' avoiding the attention of the emperor's forces they reached Agra, where they decided to halt for a few days. Aurangzeb meanwhile continued with his anti-Hindu crusade, converting hundreds to Islam by force. His forces carried on destruction of famous Hindu temples, reaching Mathura, plundering and destroying the famous ancient Keshavrai temple and proceeded towards the Govardhan Hills. Ignoring the patronizing letters of his predecessor's orders, the army reached the hills but Aurangzeb was not aware of the Lord's flight from the temple. Bereft of the deity though the temple was' a few brave and staunch devotees under the leadership of two men Sevak and Saubhadra defended the temple bravely preventing the army from entering the premises; miraculously the two of them succeeded in defeating the small army. Aurangzeb however sent a bigger army and when the army reached the temple, it had completely disappeared from sight.

Despite such turbulences all around, Shrinathji's entourage had secretly arrived in Agra, expressing His wish to celebrate Diwali and Annakoot festival (one of the main festivals of shrinathji) which were celebrated very quietly and in great secrecy. Meanwhile Shri Navnitpriaji (the infant form of Shrinathji) who was in Gokul joined the journey too. After the Annakoot festival, (celebrated the day after Diwali where a royal feast is offered to Shrinathji) the journey resumed further to a place called Dandotidhar near Gwalior on the banks of river Chambal.

In spite of all the secrecy, Aurangzeb still came to know about the journey of Shrinathji..A troop was sent to follow and plunder this small group along the banks of Chambal where they pitched their tents, planning carefully the action they would take. Shrinathji promised Gangabai that he would take care of the situation and no one should be worried. The armies from the oppsite banks were trying to locate Shrinathji but all they could see on the oppsite bank were fierce lions instead of human beings and Shrinathji's chariot appeared to be a huge mountain. This sight scared the soldiers into a retreat. the Lord had created an illusion to show His divine powers to strengthen their faith in Him, the group then moved further, arriving at a village called Krisnapur, where they halted for twenty seven days; they arrived at Dandotidhar- where they spent nearly four months.

After four months Shrinathji expressed his wish to resume the journey towards Kota in Rajasthan. The Rajput king of Kota offered protection and permanent residence, however Shrinathji never wished to permanently live in Kota. He graced the king for four months and again ordered to resume journey further. This time their destination would be Jodhpur. The entourage proceeded towards Jodhpur (Rajasthan) via Puskar, another town in Rajasthan where Shrinathji expressed his desire for the beautiful lotus flowers growing in the nearby lake. Immediately four men went in search of the flowers and after they were brought and offered to him, they proceeded further.

From Pushkar, they approached Kishengarh, where the king was a devotee and a follower of Shri Gusainji. Upon the king's request Shrinathji graced him and halted for a few days, celebrating the festival of Holi. They journeyed further halting for a day at a small village called Baneval and further to another village called Visalpur; where he graced a very special devotee, a young sanyasi, who had come to Vraj for the darshan of Shrinathji. While his guru went atop the hills to the temple, this young man could not get himself to put his foot on the hills as he had known that the Govardhan hills were also a form of Shri Krishna Himself; he therefore returned without the darshan but his heart ached for Shrinathji, who was aware of his devotee's condition and had therefore traveled long distances to grace His devotee and bless him with His darshan. The sanyasi was blissful, he offered a wooden board according to his wishes and Shrinathji is forever offered Rajbhog (mid day meal) on this board to honor the simple offering of a devotee.

Then the entourage arrived in Jodhpur, where the royal family, welcoming them, offered them residence in Jodhpur. Shrinathji however selected a small village called Champaseni, a couple of miles away from Jodhpur to reside for four months. This place was a picturesque wilderness with beautiful flowering trees and rustic setting, a perfect ambience of Shrinathji. Meanwhile Govindrai (the chief administrator and the descendant of Shri Vallabhacharyaji) visited Udaipur and conveyed Shrinathji's desire to reside in Mewar to the king who was aware of Aurangzeb's non-tolerance policy towards the Hindus. The king offered military protection and every other facility to make Shrinathji comfortable and happy. After the Annakoot festival in Champaseni Shrinathji's chariot and His band of devotees arrived in small village of Sinhad, where at a particular place the chariot came to a halt. Gangabai was told by Shrinathji that this was the place where Ajab Kunwar resided and He wished His temple to be built around this very spot. The area surrounded by Aravalli hills, reminded him of Vraj and river Banas flowing, nearly reminded him of river Yamuna. It was a perfect location for Him to settle down. Ajab Kunwar (who was quite old at that time and had been living in Udaipur) was ecstatic on hearing about Shrinathji's

arrival in Sinhad and immediately rushed to welcome her beloved.

The royal family welcomed Shrinathji and celebrating the occasion with great festivities. Shri Govindraiji ordered Gopaldas Mistri to construct a beautiful temple at the chosen spot. In 1728, Shrinathji was seated in the temple with proper Vedic rites, the day was Falgun Vad Saptami (the seventh day of the dark half of the month of falgun) and this day is to this date celebrated as Patotsav. (the day on which the deity is seated in the temple) A huge Gaushaala with hundreds of cows was provided, (for Shrinathji's love for cows was quite known) the milk and milk products of which were used for the Bhog of Shrinathji. The Goswami family with Govindraiji as their head and their descendants thereafter has since then until the present times served Shrinathji with great love and devotion. Gracing innumerable devotees, the journey of Shrinathji which lasted for twenty nine months finally ended as the Lord, fulfilling His promise to Ajab Kunvar finally decided to make Sinhad his abode and reside here surrounded by magnificence that befits royalty.

CHAPTER - 4

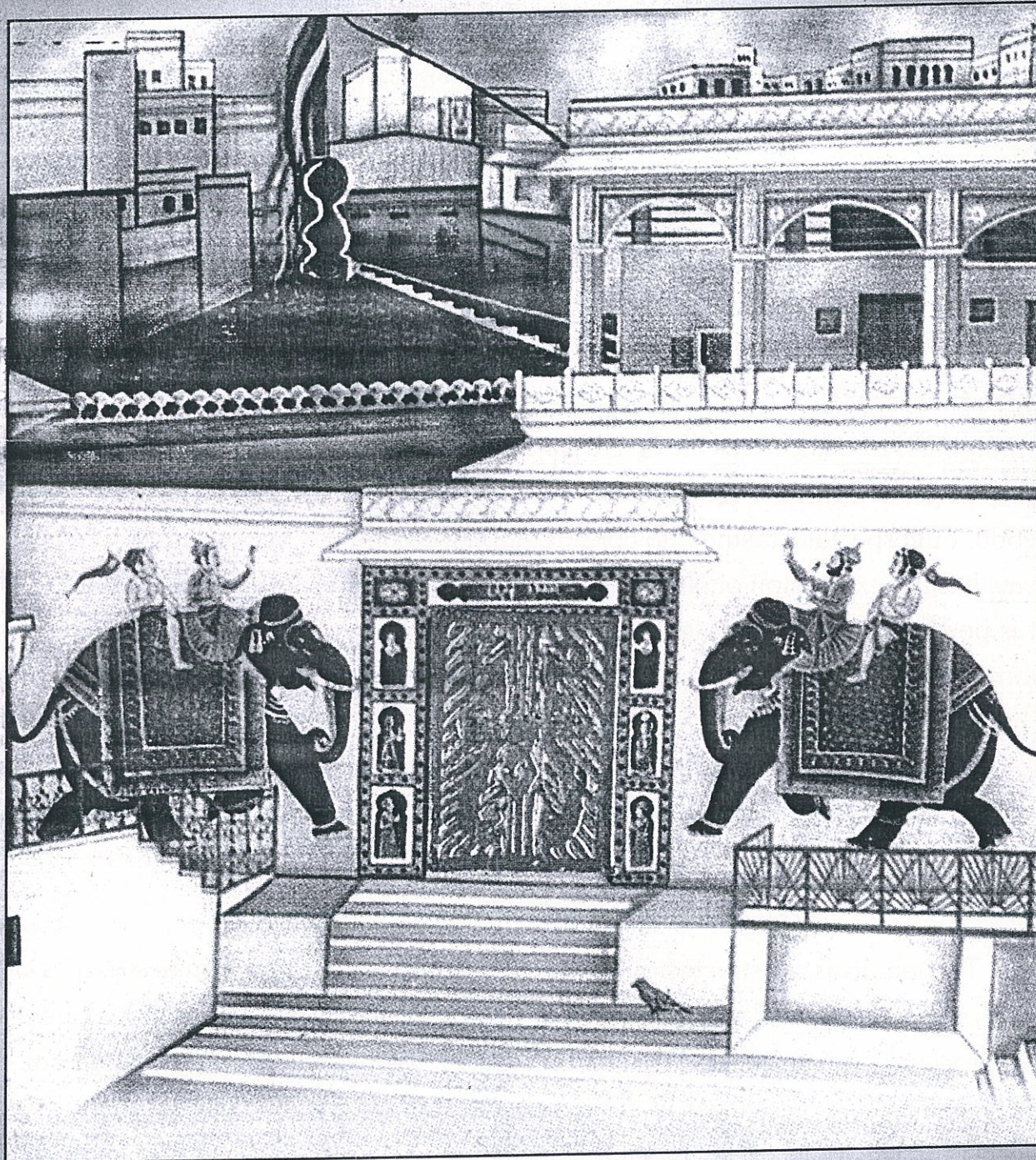
NATHDWARA - THE TEMPLE TODAY

After twenty nine months of journey through various states of India, Shrinathji finally chose His residence in the deserts of Rajasthan. Mewad or Veer Bhoomi the land of the valiant Rajputs was feeling grateful and fulfilled at the arrival of Shrinathji. The spot where the chariot halted was chosen by to be His new home. Temporarily a tiled thatch roofed house was made, around which a magnificent temple was planned. Shri Hariraiji, (one of the more devoted and powerful descendants of Shri Vallabhacharyaji, who then lived nearby in Khimnor) arrived immediately and guided the construction of the temple, the small town of Sinhad was rechristened **NATHDWARA** or the gateway to the Lord's abode. River Banas was the much favourite river Yamuna and the surrounding Bada Magra Hills were considered similar to the Giriraj hills. the temple was constructed taking into consideration the sentiment or the Bhaav of **DWADASH NIKUNJ** (the twelve enchanted wildernesses in Brindaban where Shri Radha and Shri Krishna perform their divine Leelas). Shrinathji is also known as the **NIKUNJ NAYAK** or the one who is the Lord of the nikunj. The temple in Sinhad is constructed in its own different style unlike any other temple in the world, built specially taking into consideration the comforts of Shrinathji in every possible way. It is the expression of **NANDALAYA** (Nand Bawa's residence in Gokul) of the Past. It is perhaps the only temple in the world which does not have a Shikhar or the normal dome like structure; but still embodies the original tiled thatched roof that was first built on Shrinathji's arrival here. This is significant of the fact that this temple is Nand Bawa's house; the young Shri Krishna forever lives here with his parents Nand and Yashodaji. The entire seva or the routine of worship of Shrinathji is performed with **VATSALYA BHAAV** or motherly love similar to that of Yashodaji or Madhurya Bhaav or a consort's love similar to that of Radhaji.

The temple is constructed over a great area of land and stands majestic in its awesome vastness. Every inch of space is used with a particular purpose and is an expression of a variety of underlying feelings. While Shrinathji Himself is seated below a tiled roof, the rest of the temple is constructed in stone and white marble. The paintings portray various aspects and occasions of Shri Krishna's life and are done picturesquely in Mewari or picchwai style so typical of Rajasthan paintings. This gives a novel vibrancy to the temple and a uniqueness of its own. Similarly huge gates and vast hallways or chowks which abound the temple also lend a touch of uniqueness. these and many others are the many features that are typical only of the Nathdwara temple not to be seen at any other place.

The mode of worship here is termed as Seva or service, and is performed in the same

Main Entrance to the Temple



(Nathdwara)

opulent style as decided and encoded by Shri Gusainiji. While according to Hindu religion the mode of worship performed in a temple or at home is generally termed as Puja, the term Seva is typical to Pushti Marga as given by Shri Vallabhacharyaji. The system of Seva embodies the system of offering everything to Shri Krishna by the means of total surrender at his feet. The Seva of Shrinathji in the temple and at home embodies RAAGA, BHOG AND SHRINGAR and the best of these were offered to him and continue to be done even today upholding the highest in the traditions of devotionism as shown by Shri Vallabhacharyaji and Shri Gusainiji. Every function and every little detail necessary for the Seva are allotted their fixed places, like the **PHOOL GHAR** is a hall where flowers are stored, cleaned, sorted, and beautiful **MALAS** or garlands are made. Similarly Shaak Ghar is a place where vegetables are sorted, cleaned and cut for the bhog; then there is **DOODH GHAR** where preparations out of milk are made, **MISRI GHAR** is a place where sugar is cleaned and processed. there are places like **PAAN GHAR**, then huge store rooms for food grains, huge kitchens where meals to be offered (BHOG) are prepared. There is even a strong room, storing precious jewelry and ornaments which is known as the **GEHNA GHAR**. There are huge enclosed spaces where essences and perfumes **ATTAR** are extracted from exotic and seasonal flowers. There are special tailors and a tailoring house for making Shrinathji's clothes. The vastness of the temple thus encompasses place for every need of the Lord and therefore facilities and arrangements have been made accordingly.

The Temple resembles a small sultanate in its grandeur and glory, with more than a thousand people working in the different departments. The activities involved in the Seva are hectic and fast paced and go on round the clock, as the luxury and magnificence seen here are greater in comparison to any king. **KRISHNA BHANDAR** is a special department created to manage the finances and precious gifts that are a daily feature of the temple. The stupendous income and expenditure of the temple are also accounted for in this department.

There are some typical features of the temple which require a special mention. the temple has twelve huge gates in different directions and four open squares or **CHOWKS** :- 1) The **GOVARDHAN** Chowk 2) The **KAMAL** Chowk 3) The **RATNA** Chowk 4) The **ANAR** Chowk on entering the temple from the main gate, we pass the NAQUAR KHANA or a special place where drums called Naquaras and Shehnai are played during **Rajbhog** (mid afternoon meal), we then enter straight into the Govardhan chowk. This open square embodies the bhaav of Shri Giriraj and during the Annakoot festival, local Adivasis come here to loot the rice that is offered to Shrinathji according to an ancient tradition. The

Govardhan Chowk itself opens in three directions. On the left side is passage which leads to the Navnitpriyaji Temple (Navnitpriyaji is the infant form of Shri Krishna when he was barely a few months old). Straight ahead is a flight of nine steps leading to a gate called SURAJ POLE OR SUN GATE which opens during the time of darshan and the devotees rush in for the darshan. On the right from the Govardhan Chowk is again a flight of nine steps which leads to DHOLI PATIYA - an open space representing the bhaav of Shesh Naag (The eternal giant serpent who carrying the burden of the Earth on its hood - a resting bed for eternal ShriVishnu and Laxmi as the Indian mythology goes). the flight of nine steps on both side represents **NAVDHA BHAKTI** or the nine fold path of devotion which every devotee has to climb in order to attain the Supreme.

From the Dholi Patiya one enters the gate called **SINH POLE** or the **LION GATE** the gate is so named because of the two lions constructed there. These lions embody Bhakti and UPAASANA - Devotion and Penance for the attainment of the Supreme. From the sinh pole, one enters the kamal chowk, a vast open square of great significance. A huge lotus- a twenty four petalled flower is depicted in the centre of the flooring representing Vraj Bhoomi which is depicted as being of lotus formation in the Hindu Scriptures. It is designed keeping in mind the divine RAAS LEELA of Shri Krishna and it is believed that Shrinathji performs RAAS even today.

Left from the Kamal Chowk is the Hathi Pole or Elephant Gate from where one enters the RATNA CHOWK. Even the Sun Gate leads one to the same Ratna Chowk. This open square has its own importance. Entry into the Chowk leads to the attainment of the fruits of all the pilgrimages one may ever make in ones own lifetime. it is said that on entering Dholi Patiya one develops love for Shrinathji; on entering Kamal Chowk the bond of love gets stronger. The moment one enters the Ratna Chowk the love reaches an intensity and the craving for darshan is so deep that nothing else in the world ever matters after that.

From Ratna chowk as one looks towards the tiled roof of the temple one can get a look at the seven Dhajas; one enters into the inner sanctum of the temple for the darshan stepping into an area called dhol Tibari where he comes face to face or Sanmukh with Shrinathji satisfying himself with His darshan. No matter how crowded it is, all one remembers and is aware of is that he is in the overwhelming presence of something divine beyond comprehension and a deep sense of gratitude toward is infinite grace. This is the greatest feeling for a devotee, unparalleled by the joy of any achievement he has ever had in his lifetime. nothing matters to him except lovingly looking at and admiring the Lord's

beautiful form, he is so engrossed in the Lord's exquisite Shringar that he even forgets his own existence! This then is the ultimate grace of Shrinathji-this feeling, this devotion that one feels for him and is the ultimated fruit of Pushti Bhakti as shown by Shri Vallabhacharyaji. This over whelming feeling of grace is the highest reward of devoting oneself to Shrinathji, after which the strong faith gains greater intensity with the passage of time.

With this keen sense of peace and satisfaction, one comes out from the opposite end from where he has entered. this is the Kirtaniya Gali where the eight musicians of Shrinathji sing kirtans and play music at times other than that of darshan. The section under the thatched roof where Shrinathji is seated and which was once the house of Ajab Kunvar is called the Nij Mandir and the entire vastness of the temple is constructed around this place.

Coming through the Kirtaniya Gali one comes to Anar Chowk and back to kamal chowk. Shri Navnitpriyaji temple is connected to the main temple by a gate on the left of Ratna Chwok and small garden links this passage when both the temples simultaneously open their gates for darshan. The presence of Shri Navnitpriyaji requires a special mention. the form of Shri Navnitpriyaji is that of infant shri Krishna crawling in NandBawa's house on all fours. This is the personal deity of shri Vallabhacharyaji and has been handed over as an inheritance from one generation to the next. the seva routine here is the same as that of the main temple; this is so because when Shrinathji moved from Giriraj, Navnitpriyaji who was at Gokul wished to join him; and ever since both the forms have been worshipped together. this is the form of Shri Krishna who loves butter (Navnit). He has a loam of butter in His right hands and has His tiny little left hand on the ground. it is a tiny but a very beautiful form of a very attractive child clad in yellow dress, tiny anklets in its feet tinkling as he moves on his fours giving great pleasure to Nand and Yashoda as great delight to his devotees.

Another important place in the vast temple of Shrinathji is Mahaprabhu Shri Vallabhacharyaji's Baithakji or holy seat. Devotees pay their respect to shri Vallabhacharyaji who is their eternal Guru guiding them on this path of devotion. No description of Shri Nathdwara temple can ever be complete without mentioning the very special feature of the roof. This roof is the same traditional roof as that of Shrinathji's temple in Giriraj. When Puranmall Kshatriya designed the original temple in answering Shri Vallabhacharyaji's command, the lord Himself explicitly willed that there be no dome or shikhar. Hence even in Nathdwara the roof is built in a similar style. the Kalash (the traditional Hindu symbol of the pot) is also placed on the roof. This kalash symbolizes Shrinathji's love for his devotees.

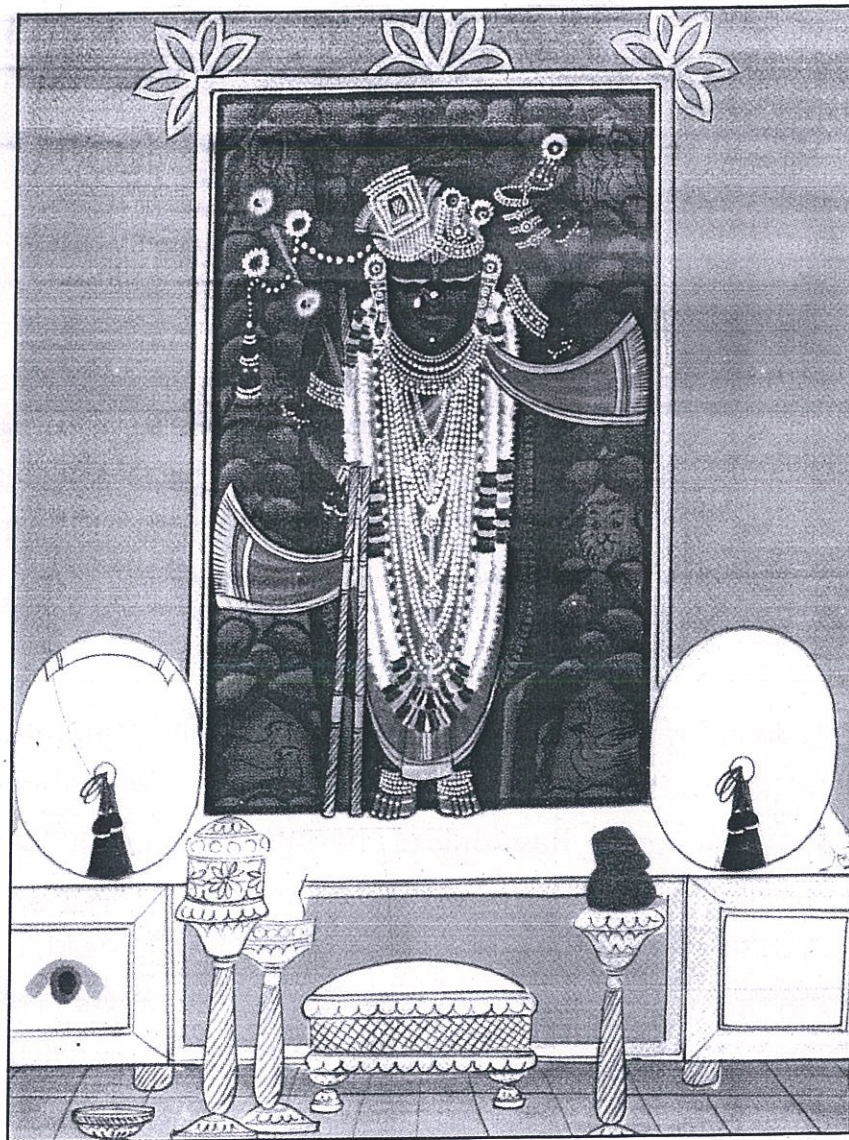
it had come out of the seas; to protect the kalash a cordon of four lions is constructed, these lions represent the Narsimha avatar of the lord. The ferocity of these lions is enough to send away the undeserving from the lord's presence. Near the kalash is the Sudarshan Chakra, the eternal weapon of Shri Krishna. the Chakra is worshipped with fragrant attars or perfumed essences and its worship fulfills the desires of the devotees. the presence of the chakra gives an immense sense of security to a devotee's heart as it represents the protection that the lord offers to his devotees.

The seven Flags atop the roof-the seven dhajas of Shrinathji are unique in their importance. While every temple and every religion may have their own banners, the Dhajas are considered to be the representative of Shrinathji Himself. While He is steadfast in the temple, the Dhaja travels occasionally and its darshan and Seva are considered to be equivalent to the darshan in the temple. The devotees worship the dhajas with the same love and reverence as Shrinathji himself. The seven colourful Dhwas flutters with pride and the very sight of them gives an immense sense of well being to a devotee's heart. the seven colors represents different sentiments and represent seven important features of Shri Krishna's divine life.

- 1 Megh Shyam (dark blue) or dark cloud colour represents Shrinathji himself.
- 2 Yellow-represents the fair complexion of Shri Radhikaji
- 3 Shyam or a lighter shade of black-represents shri Yamunaji.
- 4 White- represents Chandravaliji- a sakhi in Vraj leela along with Radhikaji.
- 5 Green-represents Radhasahachari-also a sakhi in Vraj Leela.
- 6 Purple-represents the Govardhan Hills
- 7 Pink-represents the Gopis of Vraj.

Oddhavji rightly describes the Gopi's as the dhajas of eternal love. These Dhajas are not just coloured fabric or a formal banner over a hindu temple but they are the representatives of the greatness and pride of the Pushti Marg and the immense grace of the lord. Therefore when a devotee's wishes are fulfilled; the lord is offered Raajbhog (if the devotee wishes so) and at this time a new Dhaja is offered in the place of a old one. They are seven in number because they represent the seven forms of Shrinathji. they are seven because the grace and name of Shrinathji are spread over the seven seas; they fulfill the wishes of the devotees in the Seven Lokas or worlds. Vaishnav devotees therefore have the same love and reverence for the Dhaja as for Shrinathji Himself.

Amongst all the different religions and even in the other Hindu temples around the world, the seva routine and the style of Nathdwara temple is ideal, unique and beautiful. No other temple has such a sensuous expression of love and beauty as that of the Shrinathji temple. The aesthetic sense and the presence of the lord's power encompasses the devotee the moment he enters the temple and takes his feelings from modest devotion to an awesome faith and a many splendoured feeling of love which only Shrinathji can command. The administration of the temple is therefore precise, proper and well looked after. The vastness of the temple and the intrinsic Seva routine demand this precise and perfect administration and therefore we see different departments working very efficiently to ensure a smooth working of the temple affairs. But above all the feeling that rules the entire intricate routine is to ensure comfort of Shrinathji and this is a feeling that pervades every Vaishnav heart anywhere in the world.



(One of the many beautiful Shringaars of Shrinathji / Summer - Monsoon)

CHAPTER - 5

SHRINATHJI THE FORM DIVINE

What the Vedas describe as Brahma, Smritis describe as Parmatma, Gita describes as Purushottam and Bhagvat describes as Bhagwan that Supreme element is Shri Krishna Himself. Krishna is total **bliss** and manifests Himself again and again (**Sambhavami Yugay Yugay**) as He wills. As Shri Krishna Himself He has many names according to His various virtues (gunas), His various Leelas; certain Leelas therefore which are extraordinary are permanent or 'nitya'. Shri Krishnas Leelas in Vraj are such eternal Leelas. The lifting of the Govardhan Hill or the Govardhan Leela where Indra's pride was subdued is one such eternal Leela which gives the name of GIRIRAJDHARAN; GOVARDHANNATH etc. to Shri Krishna and this form of the Lord is Nitya or eternal. It is this form which has manifested itself from the caverns of the Govardhan Hills and which is today worshipped as Shri Govardhannathji or Shrinathji for short.

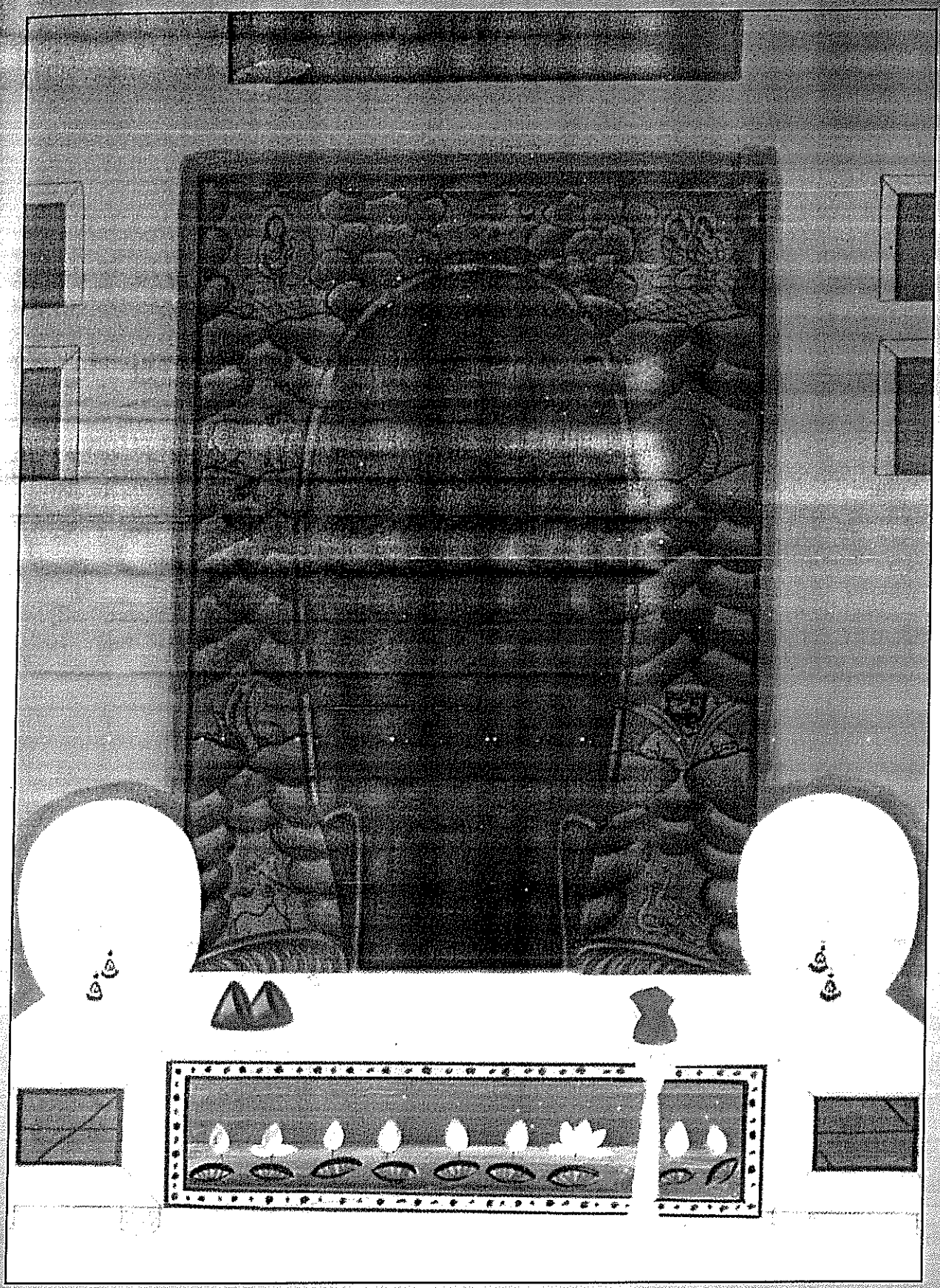
Shrinathji's form or Shri Vighraha is therefore not just a man made idol or deity, nor is it a relic of some ancient image lying buried somewhere, but is a form in which Shri Krishna Himself chose to manifest out of his own divine will; with the purpose of enjoying the love of his devotees and bestowing His immense grace upon them. The various names of Shri Krishna like Govind, Gopal, Gokulnath, Girirajdharan, Nikunjnak, Vrindavanvihari, Radhavar, Raasbihari, Madanmohan etc; are all the various names of Shrinathji. The form of Shrinathji is the personification of the total essence of everything beautiful and blissful, as the Vedas describe RASOVAISAH. It is the personification of eternal love, the PREMATMAK Swaroop or form of Shri Krishna; whose basic nature is Grace or 'Kripa', for every being who takes refuge at his Lotus feet. The sole motive for Shri Krishna's manifestation as Shrinathji is to attract His devotees to Himself and bestow His grace upon them.

Shrinathji is wonderful beautifully in His dark (Shyam) form and the devotees loses his heart to Him at just one glance. His dark complexion similar to that of dark rain bearing clouds represent the Shringaar Ras (one of the nine Rasas described in the scriptures; representing the sentiment of love). The form of Shrinathji is therefore Shringaar Rasatmak or personification of Shringaar Ras. He is seen with left hand raised, this left had lifted the Govardhan Hills to protect His dear Vrajwasis from Indra's warth. (This was the hand that first appeared in Vraj in 1470) This hand therefore seems to invite all the devotees towards Him, giving them a sense of security and protection, an assurance that when every other power fails a person, He will always be there to protect them and love them. The right hand is placed on the waist closed in a fist with the thumb enclosed pointing towards the

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(Pithika - The Stele in The Form)

feet, indicating His possessiveness about His devotees whose heart is enclosed in That fist forever.

The magnetically beauteous face of Shrinathji, which has been attracting thousands of devotees towards itself over the centuries is indeed the most strikingly majestic feature of Shrinathji's form. The delicate lips, the nose adorned with a huge pearl, the chin adorned by a diamond, the head adorned by various headgears decorated by his favourite peacock feathers, the ears with jewel studded 'Kundalas' or ear rings simply mesmerizes the devotee and the beauty of His face inspires poetry even in the hearts of lilliterates. One look at that face is enough to make one forget one's own existence and pledge not only this life but the next at His feet.

His very attractive feet are the refuge of millions of His devotees so also of the heavenly and celestial beings. They possess sixteen divine symbols.

The lotus petalled eyes of Shrinathji are perhaps the most sensous and inspiring feature of his divine form. Beautifully attractive, they draw us towards Him like iron filings towards a magnet. They are cast in a glance downwards, constantly watching all who surrender themselves at His feet. The entire Swarup or form of Shrinathji is sensuously beautiful as we say Shrinathji is Sarvaang Sunder (totally beautiful) and Shri Vallabhacharyaji has aptly described this beauty in his MADHURASHTAKAM an eight versed hymn describing the beauty of Shrinathji. No words would be enough to describe this beauty which can be best known by seeing Him and by experiencing his grace.

The PITHIKA or Stele of Shrinathji's form is also a symbolically beautiful feature with a prominence of its own. This stele surrounds the actual body of Shrinathji in the form. During the Mangala Darshan in the early mornings in summer we can see the entire form with the Stele which is later covered when Shrinathji is adorned with Shringar (dress and jewelry). There are nine symbols in the Stele representing the Navdha Bhakti or the nine fold path of devotion. Overhead is the parrot, on the top left are two Rishis (asetics), below them is the symbol of a serpent; below it, a lion and below the lion are two peacocks,. On the right side from the top are a rishi, below it, a ram (sheep), then Sheshnaag; below which are two cows to be seen with their ears raised. These nine symbols show the ninefold path of devotion.

1. The snake is Shravan Bhakti or devotion developed by hearing about the divine leelas of the Lord.
2. The parrot represents Kirtan Bhakti or devotion expressed by singing his praises.

3. The three rishis at the top represent Smaran Bhakti on devotion through remembering the Lord's grace, His Leelas and his Form; teaching us how to experience the path of sublime love.
4. The ram represents Paad Sevan or the worship of his Lotus feet.
5. The peacocks represent Archan Bhakti or devotion through worship.
6. The other serpent represents Vandan Bhakti or prostrating at His feet.
7. The two cows represent earth and duty Prithvi and Dharma and are showing Atma Nivedan or the way of self surrender and Dasya Bhakti or way of service to Him.
8. The Lion symbolises Narasimha Avataar and represents Saakhya Bhakti or a friend's way of love. The Caverns in the form are representative of the Giriraj Hills who is the foremost of all his devotees Haridaasvarya (chief among all His devotees). The wave like formations represent Shri Yamunaji who is the Lord's eternal consort like Shri Radhikaji and of the most important element of Pushti Marga along with Shrinathji and Shri Vallabhacharyaji because it is only with the grace of Shri Yamunaji that one can attain the grace and darshan of Shrinathji.

Shrinathji's form is that of a protector. In this form He is the protector of the entire universe, and every living being. By meditating on this form one attains eternal love and devotion. As a protector of the universe, every being and everybody is equal in His eyes, be it a rishi meditating at His feet or a vicious snake; a gentle bird or a ferocious animal; every living being, high or low is enchanted by the divine melody from His flute and forgetful of everything is enraptured by its melodious notes. These symbols in the Stele therefore represent the type of beings that live within the caverns of the Giriraj and are virtually thirsting to catch one glimpse of their beloved Shrinathji. When Shri Krishna lifted the Giriraj every type of living being had surrendered to Him and he had protected every one of them from the wrath of Indra. Such is grace and generosity, that though Indra had offended Him, He did not punish him but forgave him and merely subdued his pride.

When the form of Shrinathji manifested itself from the Govardhan Hills. He introduced himself as DEVDAMAN, NAGDAMAN, and INDRADAMAN the Lord of Vraj. Thus these three names of Shrinathji denote the three Leelas of Shri Krishna were performed while He lived in Vraj. Devdaman denotes the subduing of the pride of various 'Devas' or celestial beings such as Brahma, Varuna, Agni, Kaamdeva, etc. His name Nagdaman denotes the subduing of the mighty serpent Kaaliya and Indraman denotes the subduing of Indra's pride while lifting the Govardhan Hills. These are the various Leelas of Shri Krishna and

Shrinathji himself has declared that he is none other than Shri Krishna Himself. This form of Shrinathji is personification of total bliss and total love Poorna Anand and Poorna Prem.

In these modern times, when we are living a complex life and cannot attain His darshan or perform his seva at all times, Shrinathji has graced us by giving us His name form in the form of Shrimad Bhagvat; which is the Namatmak Swarup (Name form). The twelve chapters of which represent the twelve different parts of Shrinathji's divine body and is represented by the Astakshar Mantra or the mantra of eight syllables.

Such is the beauty of Shrinathji, the One who is beautiful beyond everything beautiful and attractive beyond attraction itself. This is one beautiful glass of nectar 'the more you drink from it, the more you thirst for it'.

CHAPTER - 6

THE ASHTA JHANKIS

The haveli, so significantly representing the Nandalaya or the residence of Shri Nandji is virtually the palace of the divine childking. Shrinathji is often referred to by his devotees as Rajadhiraaj, Annadaata, Thakur, etc (meaning the King of all Kings; the Lord protector and benefactor) The daily routine in the temple here therefore has a set pattern, a definite time to time traditional routine firmly established. Shri Vallabhacharyaji had shown a very simplistic form of Seva, but with Shrinathji's explicit wishes Shri Vitthalnathji inculcated the essence of everything beautiful in the seva; the basis of which was that whatever is suitable for us and makes us feel comfortable can also be used conveniently for the Lord. This is so because the mode of worship in Pushti Marga is known as Seva which most literally means service with selfless surrender and love without any expectations of returns. This therefore transcends mere worship of God to sublime heights and gives a depth and meaning to every mood of love. Shri Vitthalnathji and some of his descendants have taken the style and mood of seva to their gloriously beautiful heights which is akin to something of a royal routine fit for an emperor. The best in everything has to be offered to Shrinathji, so the best of adornments food and other paraphernalia required are to be used in the Seva. Under the watchful guidance of Shri Vitthalnathji (Gusainji) the seva of Shrinathji increased in every way. The festival celebrations became more opulent, patterns of RAAGA, BHOGA and SHRINGAAR were codified and set scientifically according to the time and the seasons.

Great significance is given to the seasons because Shrinathji, the small child that He is would easily be affected by the changes in the weather. While in summer He appears wearing a thin muslin 'dhoti' in the mornings, in winter He is seen totally covered with quilted coats. It is therefore Shri Gusainji's deep faith and love and Shrinathji's own will for opulence that is visible at the basis of the Shringaar and the Seva pattern in the temple.

The Shringaar as we see here are also supplemented by artistic uses of the SAAJA (additional paraphernalia use in the temple) or the decorative supplements that surrounds the deity, and are the symbolic expression of the philosophy and principles imbibed in Pushti Marga and the mood of Shrinathji Himself. Every little thing used in the Seva is carefully used as the minutest expression of a feeling. The Seva is therefore performed with two types of Bhaav or underlying feelings; one is the Vatsalya Bhaav or a motherly feeling (that of Shri Yashodaji), the other is Madhurya Bhaav that of consort like that of Shri Radhikaji for Shri Krishna. The routine of the temple encompasses these two feelings at their splendid best. Shrinathji Himself is the lover of everything that is beautiful for he is SHRINGAAR RASA personified, and enjoys everything that is offered of Him with Love.

The intricate Seva routine and the paraphernalia used for the Seva are indicative of the fact that the best in jewels, clothes, food stuff, music, poetry or a devotee's feelings are offered to Him and He graciously accepts and enjoys every little thing that is offered to Him with love.

The routine of the temple predominates the mood of the entire town of Nathdwara. The town is bustling with activities much before dawn as everyone gets ready for the MANGALA Darshan and gradually gathers momentum according to the timings of the eight Darshan in the temple and by late evening, a quiet lull begins to descend on the place as the temple closes. Thus the entire pace of the town is set according to the timings of the temple.

The Sanctum is open for Darshan eight times in a day and these eight Darshan or Ashta Jhankis are symbolic of the activities involved in Shri Krishna's daily routine while He lived in Nandji's house in Gokul, right from when he is awakened in the mornings till He retires to bed after a busy day. He is seen in a set routine and the devotees get a glimpse of His various moods during these eight Darshans. These Darshans are aesthetic expressions of the activities that surround him and one cannot but wonder at the glory and splendour of Shrinathji.

Special mention has to be made about the music in the temple. Since Shri Gusainji established the concept of Ashtachhaap or the eight musician poets who sang and composed for Shrinathji in order to please him. These were great poets and musicians but above were great devotees of Shri Krishna who recited and wrote what they saw and experienced when He graced them with rare experiences as He did with his other devotees. Surdas, Krishnadas, Kumbhandas, Paramanandas, Chaturbhujdas, Govinddas, Chhitsuwami and Nanddas, all eight of them great devotees and this tradition is still alive as eight musician singers play in the temple before Him from dawn to dusk. The music is Indian Classical, the beautiful Raagas according to the time and season. This is indeed a very beautiful feature of the temple.

Likewise can be said about the Bhoga aspect of the Seva in the temple. The Bhoga or the various meals offered here during the day is a magnificent feast fit for a king. Round the clock the cooks and their helpers concoct great traditional recipes for the Bhoga. The food prepared here is rich in element and taste. Greater emphasis is on products made from milk, sugar, dry fruits and grains of practically every type. Tons of food grains are used in the temple as culinary experts prepare traditional Indian fare for the Bhoga of Shrinathji. There are eight main Bhoga or meals and also supplementray in between meals offered to Him. These are again fixed by the traditions as established by Shri Gusainji.

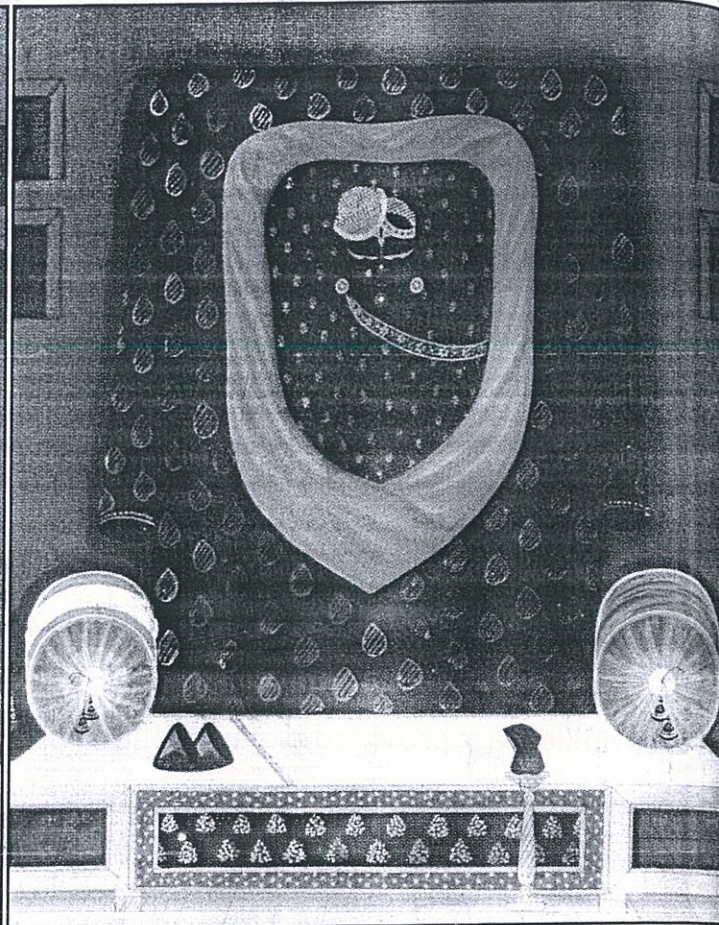
The Shringaar (adornments) of the Lord are better seen than read. Careful attention is paid to every minute details as the Lord is dressed up and adorned meticulously and majestically. The Shringaar is set according to the season, time and occasion. Care is taken to offer thin muslin material in summer and thick brocades, silks and satins in winter. Finest of silks, velvets, cottons and tie-and-dye fabrics etc. are used according to the seasons adorned with lovely designs and exquisite embroidery. The background (pichhvaies) and the Saaja (the surrounding adornments) match the dress for the day.

Festival times have the Shringaar at its finest. The jewelry matches the clothes, so also the flowers in the Malas (garlands). The Attars or fragrant essences of the flowers are seasonal. There are a great variety of headgears and crowns which are distinctive features of the Shringaar. The feet of Shrinathji are covered with socks in winter, also a small charcoal brazier (angithi) is lit to provide heat; as in summer water fountains adorn the temple and sprinklers are provided to ward off the intense heat and make the ambience more pleasant and bearable in the extreme weather. The variety of Shringaar, the type of dresses the headgears, the ear rings and the variety and style of necklaces and many other small and large pieces of jewelry which adorn his form are astounding. Every single day of the year is a new Shringaar and every day is a new celebration. Thus with intricate inter-weaving of Raaga, Bhoga and Shringaar, one gets the eight Jhankis or glimpses of Shrinathji every day. The seva of Shrinathji represents deep feelings of love, and exquisite artistic and aesthetic sense inspiring great emotions and great literature down the years.

The eight glimpses of Jhankis in the temple the daily routine is a beautiful combination of two very womanly feelings Yashodaji, the mother and Shri Radha the eternal consort, both serve Shri Krishna in their own loving way, and with this undercurrent in the seva we understand the feelings behind every little activity that goes on in the temple.



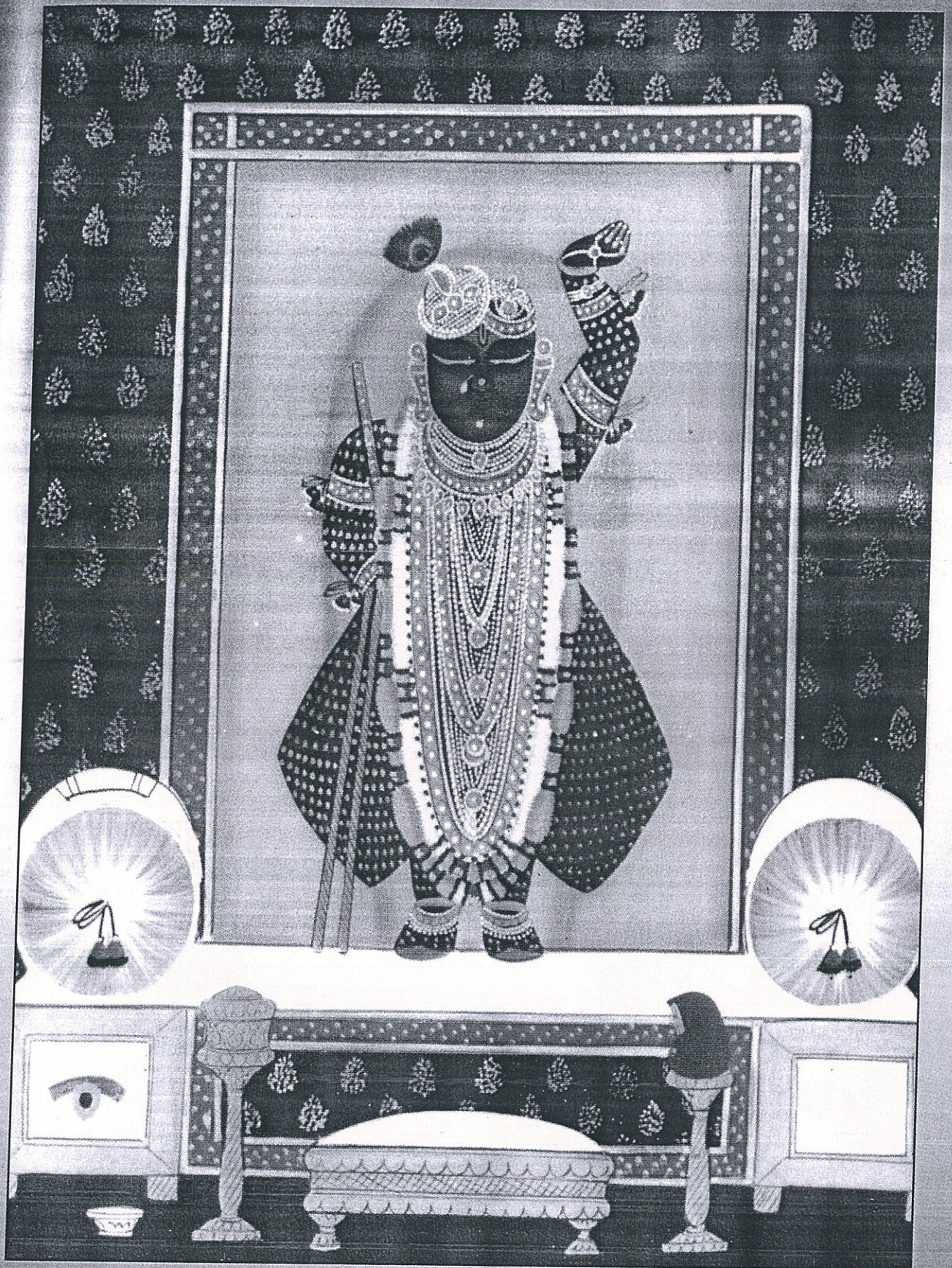
(Mangala Summer)



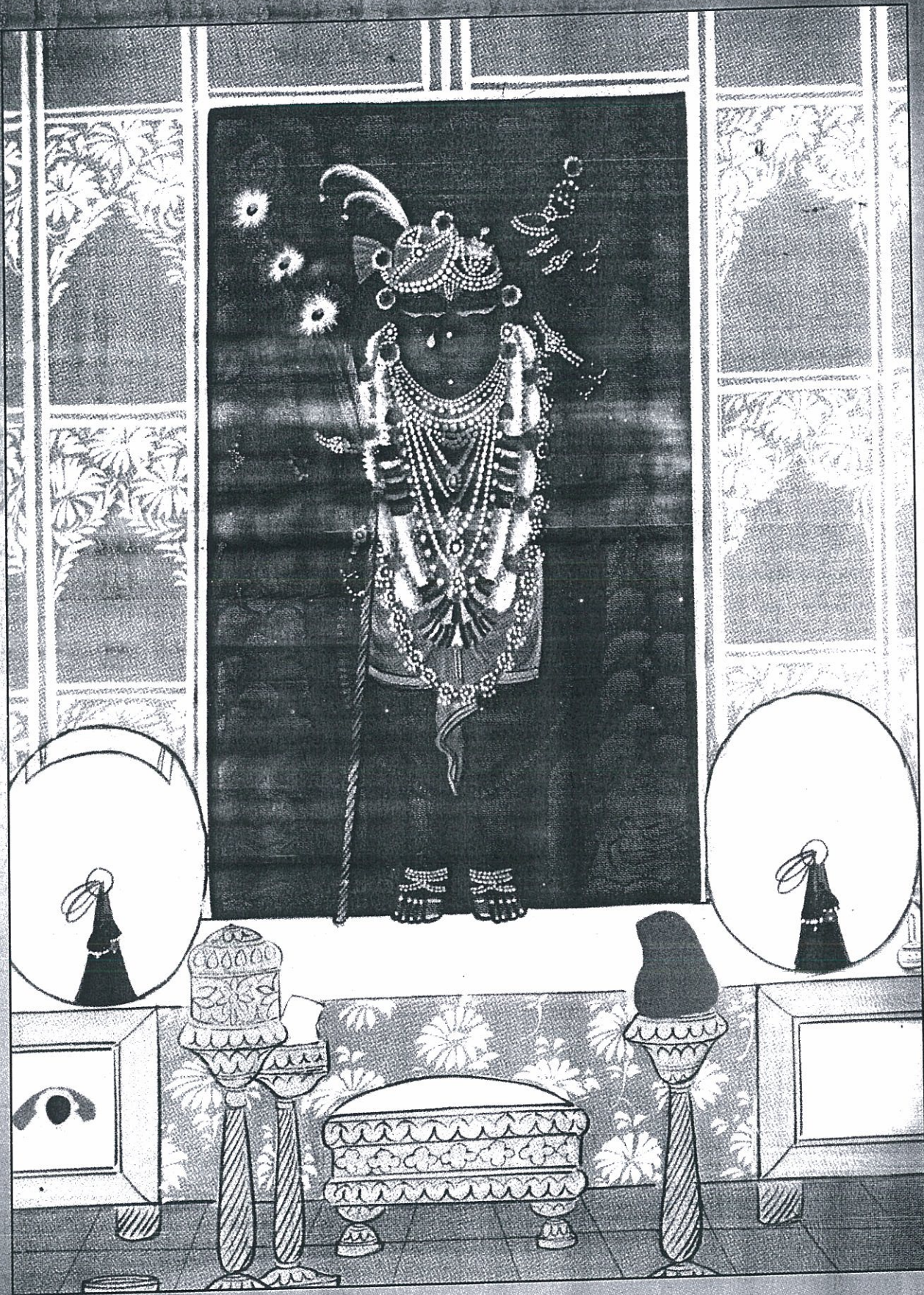
(Mangala Winter)

MANGALA

The first Darshan of the day : Before Mangala, the conch shell is blown to herald the beginning of the day and to alert the devotees to be ready for Darshan. Beena (a stringed sitar like instrument) is played in the sanctum, the slow melodies of the morning Raagas, to wake up the Lord after which Mangal Bhoga is offered. Thereafter the doors of the temple are thrown open for the devotees and Arti is performed. In winter, during this Darshan, Shrinathji is covered in thick satin quilted coats to keep away the chill while He is dressed in a fine muslin Dhoti with scanty jewelry in summers. The Mangala darshan represents auspiciousness. The sanctum is then closed as preparations are made for the Shringaar for the day.



(Shringaar in Winter)



(Shringar in Summer)

SHRINGAAR

Is the expression of a mother bathing her child and adorning Him with fresh clothes and jewelry. As described earlier, the Shringaar is scientifically classified according to the time and season, even festivals play an important part in deciding the Shringaar, deciding what the fabrics and jewelry would be. The supplements that surround the Lord are also coordinated. The Attars vary seasonally like Heena and Saffron in winter, Khus and rose in summer etc. The Malas or the flower garlands made here require a special mention as they are beautifully made with freshest seasonal flowers, showing fine artistry and made keeping in mind the colour combination of the dress offered for the day. Huge mirrors are then shown during the darshan. Shri Krishna is then handed over his beloved flute and this form of Shri Krishna totally bedecked in magnificent adornments attracts and captures the hearts of His devotees. The Sanctum closes once again for the preparation of the next Darshan.

GWAAL

Is the time when Shrinathji meets and plays with His cowherd friends in Brindaban (though not actual aarti this is similar to arti and connected to Rajbhog) Dhoop, Deep and Tulsi leaves are offered during this time and the darshan are open for a very short time as He is in a hurry to meet His cows and take them out to pasture.

RAJBHOG

The temple echoes with the sound of Shehnai and naquaras (music signifies an auspicious time of a kingly meal) as the Rajbhog opens after He has been offered His mid day meal. Rajbhog literally means a kingly layout of a variety of dishes set before a king and the darshan at this time is aptly called RAJBHOG simultaneously at this time a Bhoga and Attar is offered to the seven Dhajas over the roof of the temple by the devotees who offer special respects and thanks to the Lord on their wishes being fulfilled. After this the sanctum is closed for the afternoon. The temple quietens for a couple of hours before the activities of the early evening begin.

UTTHAPAN

While grazing the cows, during the hot afternoon it is time for a little siesta as Shrinathji rests a little in the caverns of Shri Giriraj Hills and is awakened by Shri Radha who plays soothing melodies on the Beena, as it is time for him to gather His cows and return Home. This is the sentiment behind the Darshan at this time 'this Darshan also is for a very short time.

BHOGA

This is a Darshan with a regal surrounding. Rajadhiraj or the king of all kings that He is; He returns home after the day's work with the cows from pastures surrounded by His cows on all sides and accompanied by His cowherd friends, singing and dancing all the way. Gopis the local Vrajvasi girls crowd every window and balcony to have one glimpse of their beloved. With this Bhaav we get the Darshan at this time. Then there is a short pause as the Darshan and the Lord is offered a little snack or Bhoga, after this short pause the sanctum opens again for the next Darshan.

SANDHYA AARTI

As Shri Krishan returns home Shri Yashodaji performs AARTI to ward off the at the doorstep itself. Then to ward off the fatigue. He has felt during the course of the day, He is offered fresh milk and cream. This Darshan is very beautiful as it is the expression of motherly love at its highest.

SHAYAN

Light music on the Taanpura is played in the sanctum itself as Shrinathji is offered His evening supper after which the sanctum is again opened for the day's last Darshan. Traditional Naquaras are played announcing this Darshan. It is however important to note that this Darshan is not available from the first day of the bright half of Chaitra to the ninth day of the bright of Ashwin when this Darshan is available in Jatipura village at the foothills of Shri Giriraj Hills. Beetel leaves or Beeri is offered during the Darshan itself after which the last Aarti is performed. Preparations are then made in the temple for the night with the playing of the traditional Kirtans and the sanctum is closed for the night.

The town gradually falls to a lull after the Shayan Darshan. The hecticly paced activities of a day in the Nathdwara temple comes to an end as Shrinathji retires for the night. The devotees too, after a fast paced day retire for the night thinking about the grace of the Lord. Every minute therefore that goes by is dominated by the thought of Shrinathji and the feeling at the end of the day is that of being blessed by his infinite grace.

The eight Jhankis of Shrinathji are visions of Shrinathji showing an immaculate time schedule followed in the temple according to Shri Krishna's daily routine of his day in Vraj and momentary glimpses of his divine Leelas or pastimes, and every activity of the little town of Nathdwara is totally dependent on this routine set in the temple.

CHAPTER - 7

THE FESTIVALS OF NATHDWARA

Festivals have their own special place and charm in the Seva of Shrinathji. Emerging from the heart of the deity itself, the sentiment, the fanfare and the joyous mood spills into the temple and carries the joy and ecstasy of the devotees to great heights of frenzy. The seva on these days present a rich variety of sensuous delights for the thousands who love Shrinathji. The normally crowded temple is crowded much more than usual.

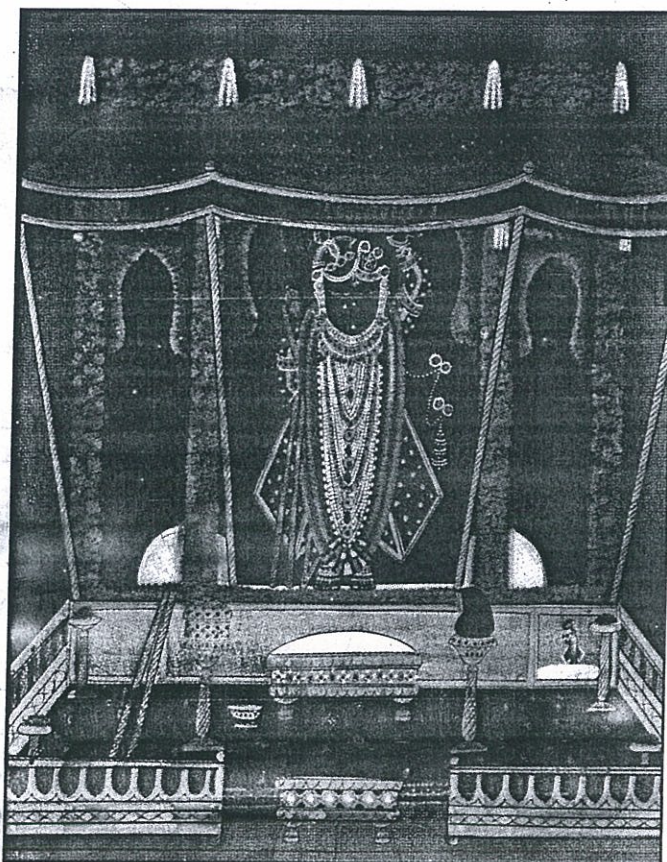
A festival or an UTSAV as it is called is a celebration of special occasions and even includes celebrations heralding the birthdays of the founders of Pushti Marga and some of their illustrious descendants. An Utsav is therefore an expression of joy at its highest and involves a great deal of love, cheer and enthusiasm. The splendor of Shrinathji increases much more according to the occasion. These festivals are not just one or two, but are celebrated all year round as Shri Krishna is bliss personified, and every moment with Him is an occasion of cheer, of bliss and it is said that in His eternal abode there is NITYA UTSAV or everlasting festivities. So also in Nathdwara every moment spent in the darshan of Shrinathji is a matter of celebration in the devotee's heart as his heart experiences a feeling of total bliss.

Hardly a week goes by without some festival being celebrated. The Shringaar, the Bhoga and the Kirtans are all special with subtle changes according to the seasons. The splendour can be noticed in the fabrics, their designs, the colors of the dress that adorn the deity and the jewels that match them; the poetry of the padas are special to the occasion as there is great amount of different festivals round the year. Accordingly there is a great variety in the Bhoga offered.

The sentiment and the mood behind every Utsav is that of the Gopis and the Vrajwasis who are the epitome of sublime love due to which the celebration of festivals invoke a lot of spontaneous affection. The listing of the festivals begin from the month of Chaitra because the New Year according to Pushti Marga begins on the first day of the bright half of the month. It is believed that Brahma, the creator created the Universe on this day thus heralding the New Year.

The mention and description of the festivals of Nathdwara would fill volumes because of the details and the intricacies of expression involved. What is therefore outlined here are one or two main festivals celebrated every month as no account of Shrinathji would be complete without the mention of the glory and grandeur of Shrinathji during the festivals. The joy and cheer in a devotee's heart which flows into the temple and echoes in thousands of Vaishnav homes throughout the world. The descendants of Shri Vallabhacharyaji have set standards of splendour and sensuousness that are unprecedented and unparalleled anywhere in any celebration around the world. This is when we get to see Shrinathji's Raaga, Bhoga and Shringaar at its best and this is when we feel and experience greatest love, devotion and ecstasy.

(Gulabful Mandli - Roseful Bunglow)



(Chaitra Sud Padva)

CHAITRA

(The sixth month according to the Hindu calendar)

The first day of the bright half of the month (Chaitra Sud Padva) heralds the beginning of the New Year of the Pushti Marga calendar. Hence it is celebrated as a festival in Nathdwara.

The ninth day is celebrated as Ram Navmi marking the birth anniversary of Shri Ram

About two weeks later, on the eleventh day of the dark half of the same month (Chaitra Vad Ekdashi) is celebrated as Shri Vallabhacharyaji's birth anniversary. The Shringaar and celebrations on this day are comparable only to that of Janmashtami, Shri Krishna's birthday. It was also on this very day that Shrinathji's face had appeared in the caverns of the Giriraj Hills in 1535. The birth of Shri Vallabhacharyaji is of great significance for all the followers of Pushti Marga because not only is he the founder of Pushti Marga but also the eternal Guru. The celebrations of this day are as grand as that of Janmashtami as according to Hindu philosophy Guru and Govind (God) are of equal importance in the eye of the devotee, for it is only through the grace of the Guru that one can attain God.

VAISHAAKH

In this month is celebrated AKSHAY TRITTYA on the third day of the bright half of this month. It is also known as the day of Chandan Yatra for Shrinathji. It marks the beginning of the hot summer season and the Lord is offered sandalwood paste and other paraphernalia to ward off the intense scorching heat and make him feel and cool and comfortable and this sort of offering continues through the entire season. More emphasis is on floral adornments than jewels throughout the season as a relief from the heat felt; even the Bhoga offered during these days have delicacies that is cool for the constitution of a young child.

The fourteenth day of the same month is celebrated as NARASIMHA CHATURDASHI the appearance of the Lord in the form of Shri Narsimha (half human half lion) for the sake of his devotee Prahlad.

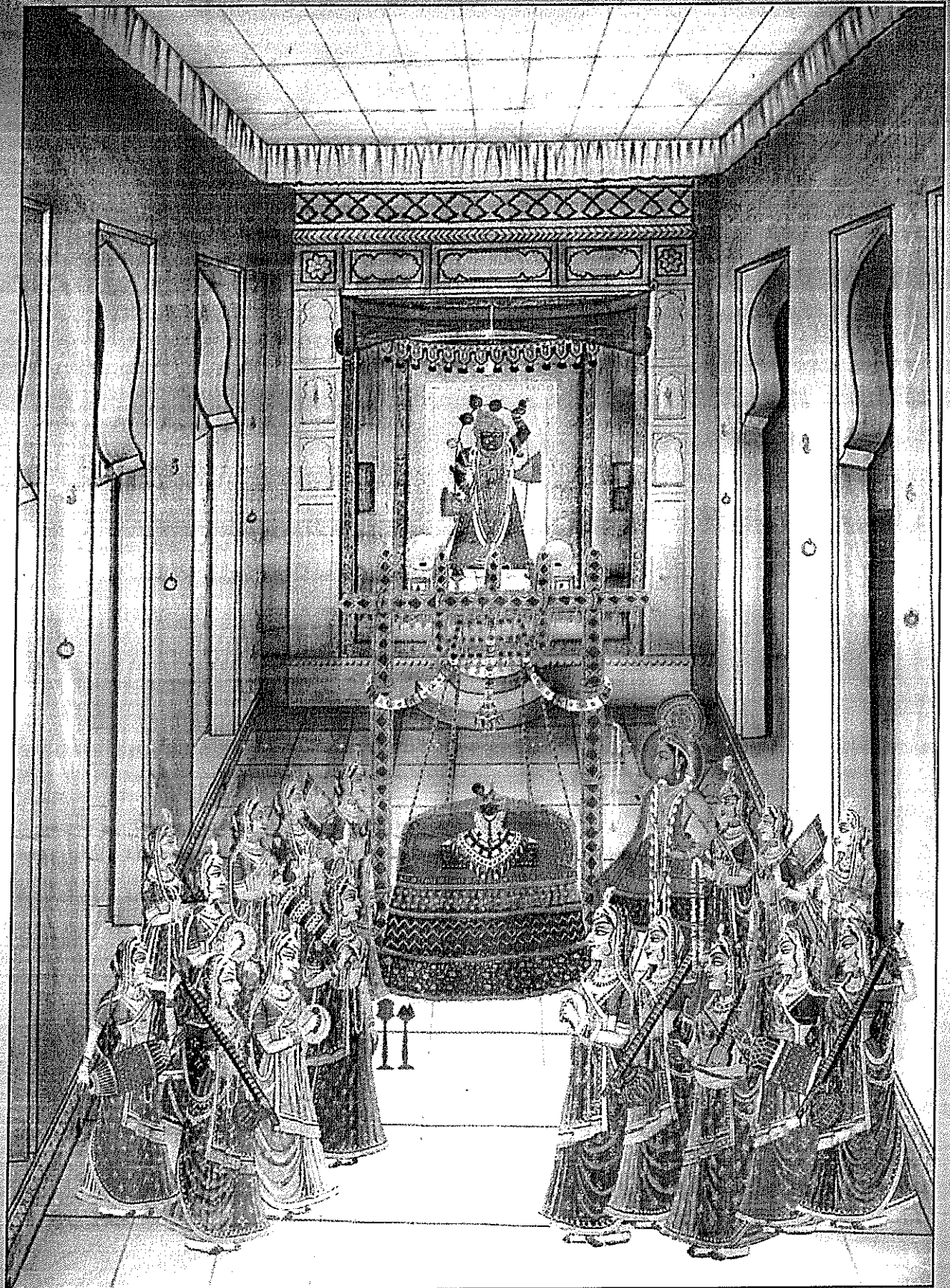
JYESHTHA

On the fifteenth day of the bright half of this month, Jyeshtha Sud Purnima, is celebrated the festival of SNAAN YATRA. Tradition says that on this day Shri Nandbawa had a small coronation ceremony for Shri Krishna in his palace and declared Him the king of Braj Boomi (Brajraaj). Amongst the chanting of Vedic mantras Shrinathji is bathed with plenty of cool fragrant waters. Special kirtans glorifying Shri Yamunaji are sung.

ASHAADH

The second day of the bright half of this month (Ashaadh Sud Beej) sees the celebration of the festival of RATH YATRA. A festival celebrated in every Hindu temple of India in following with the tradition of Shri Jagannath temple in Puri. This is the prime festival of Shri Jagdish (Lord Jagannath) another form of Shri Krishna himself. Shri Vallabhacharyaji had once been to Puri and was ordered by Shri Jagdish to include Rath Yatra amongst the chief festivals of Shrinathji. Shri Vallabhacharyaji ordered a chariot or a Rath to be made and seated Shri Navnitpriyaji in this chariot and took out a procession with great funfare. Thus the main festival of Puri began to be celebrated in the temple of Nathdwara.

From the second day of the dark half of this month, the entire period of one month is celebrated as the HINDOLA festival. The setting of the monsoons in Vraj inspires a wonderful romance for the eternal couple Shri Radha and Shri Krishna. Nikunj Nayak Shrinathji enjoys the beauty of the land, the advent of the rains in the forests of Brindaban and amongst the picturesque settings of the Giriraj Hills, even the banks of river Yamuna,



(Hindola)

swinging in the Jhoolas or Hindolas (swings suspended from branches of huge trees). The mood is of divine love at its sublime best and the magic of this mood, and the monsoon of Braj Bhoomi is captured beautifully in Nathdwara.

A great variety of Hindolas are decorated through the month using flowers, leaves, fruits, vegetables, fabrics enmeshed with fancy decorations, dry fruits, saffron, even gold and silver. The mood and the beauty is resplendent with Gopi Bhaav in all its glory and is enhanced by the kirtans especially written for this mood celebrating the romance of Shri Radha and Shri Krishna and the splendour of Brindaban during monsoon. The ragas in which they are sung are Hindol or Malhar (one of the many ragas in Indian classical music which are the monsoon ragas). Even the Bhog offered during the month are special and seasonal.

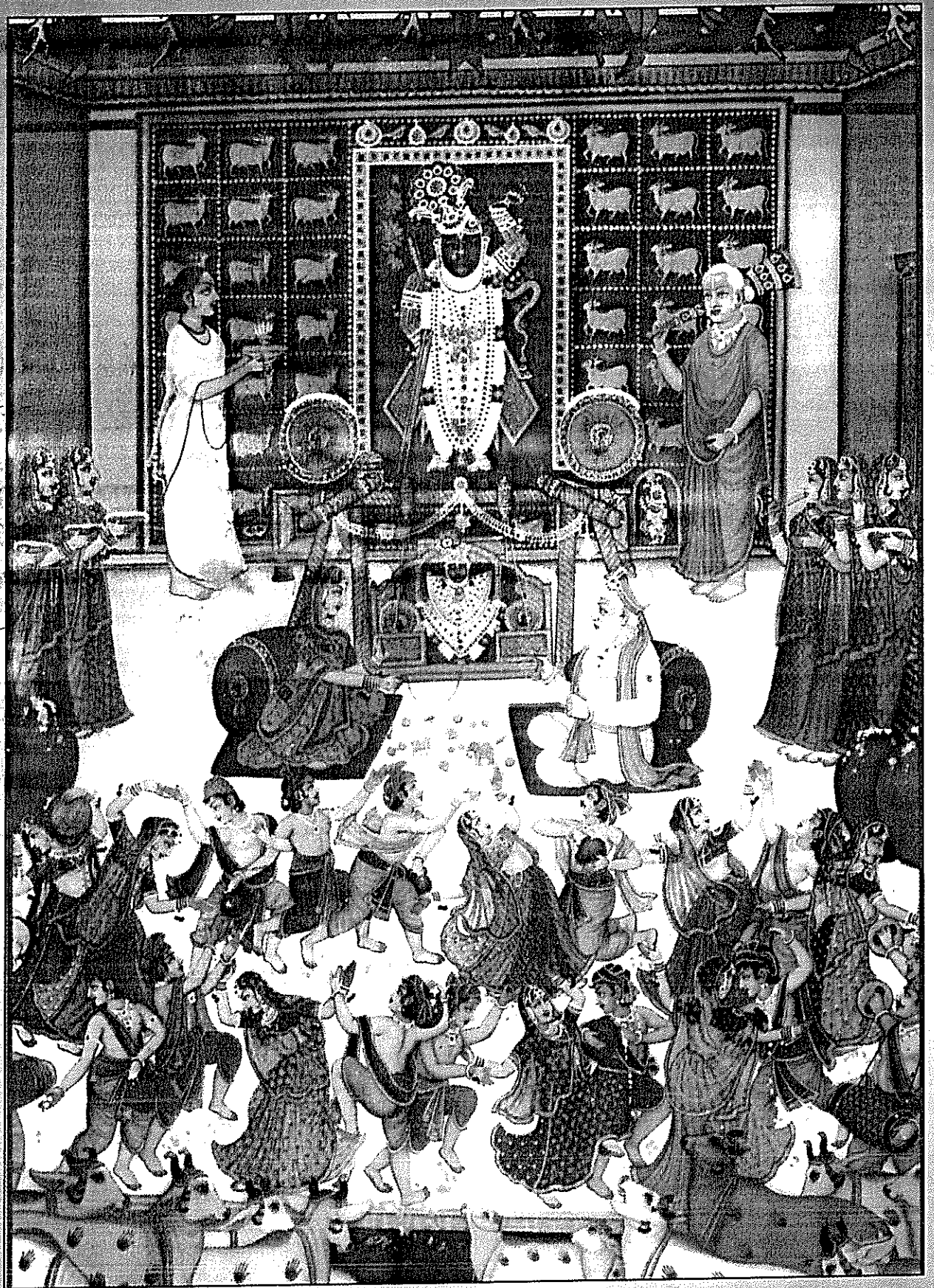
The darshan of Hindolas are in the evening during Bhog.

SHRAAVAN

The month of Shraavan is entirely a month of festival. A majority of the days of this month celebrate one festival or the other.

The hindola darshan which begin from the previous month continue for the entire first half of Shraavan. The festivities of the Hindolas are not yet over and the temple is buzzing with preparations for the celebration of Janmashtami, Shri Krishna's own birth anniversary. It is among the greater festivals of Nathdwara and is rated as Maha Mahotsav (or a great festival).

Also celebrated in this month are **Pavitra Ekaadashi and Raksha Bandhan** on the eleventh and the fifteenth day of the bright half of this month; the celebrations are held along with the Hindolas. Pavitra Ekadashi on Shraavaan Sud Ekadashi has a special significance in Pushti Marga. It was on this day that Shri Vallabhacharyaji who at that time was at Govind Ghat on the banks of River Yamuna in Gokul received the darshan and grace of Shri Krishna. It was midnight and he was in deep introspection about his mission of spreading Krishna Bhakti; when Shri Krishna appeared before him and gave him the principal mantra of self surrender to turn people towards the path of devotion. Shri Vallabhacharyaji had no other means of welcoming the Lord and therefore with all his love, humility and gratefulness offered him a garland of cotton strands (Pavitraa) and some sugar crystals (misri). Thus, Shri Vallabhacharyaji on this day established the first principal of Pushti Marga the principal of self surrender and it is with this sentiment that Pavitraas are offered, a tradition which is continued to the present in every Vaishnav home and temple.



(Nand Mahotsav)

Four days later on Shraavan Sud Punam is celebrated Raksha Bandhan, a traditional Hindu festival where the love of brother and a sister is celebrated by tying of a fancy thread around the brother's waist. A rakhi is tied on the wrist of Shrinathji with the feeling of Yashodaji protecting her child.

On the Eighth day of the dark half of Shraavan comes one of the grandest festivals of Shrinathji. It is Janmashtami the birth anniversary of the Lord Himself celebrated as Maha Mahotsav or one of the grandest festivals of the year. While every Hindu temple, every home and every devoted Hindu heart has its own way of celebrating this festival. The glory of Nathdwara on this day is at its highest. The Lord is surrounded by a feeling unfathomable love of his devotees. The day begins with **Panchamrit Snaan** offered to the Lord in the morning. (*Panchamrit is mixture prepared of five substances milk, curd, honey, sugar and ghee he is bathed with these five substances). The Shringaar is especially splendid. The celebration and the hectic activities continue through the day, till midnight when Shri Krishna was supposed to have been born. There are no darshans after the usual time but activities go on behind the closed gates of the sanctum. The Lord is awake the entire night as it is Jagran.

The frenzy of festivities and celebration of the previous day catches momentum the next morning when Nand Mahotsav is celebrated. This is the day when the people of Gokul receive the good news of Shri Krishna's birth and come to the happy parents Nand Bawa and Yashodaji; and express their joy and happiness on this occasion. Tradition has it that milk curd and butter were spilt and smeared on each other and on Nand Bawa by the Vrajwasis when the news of Shri Krishna reached them.

The Happy atmosphere of Braj, was resplendent with colors, of gulal and kesar (saffron) which symbolize joy and cheer of their hearts and every corner of the world echoes with the joyful voice ringing 'Nand Gher Anand Bhayo.... Jai Kanaiyalal Ki (Bliss has come to Nandji's house - Hail the Lord Krishna).

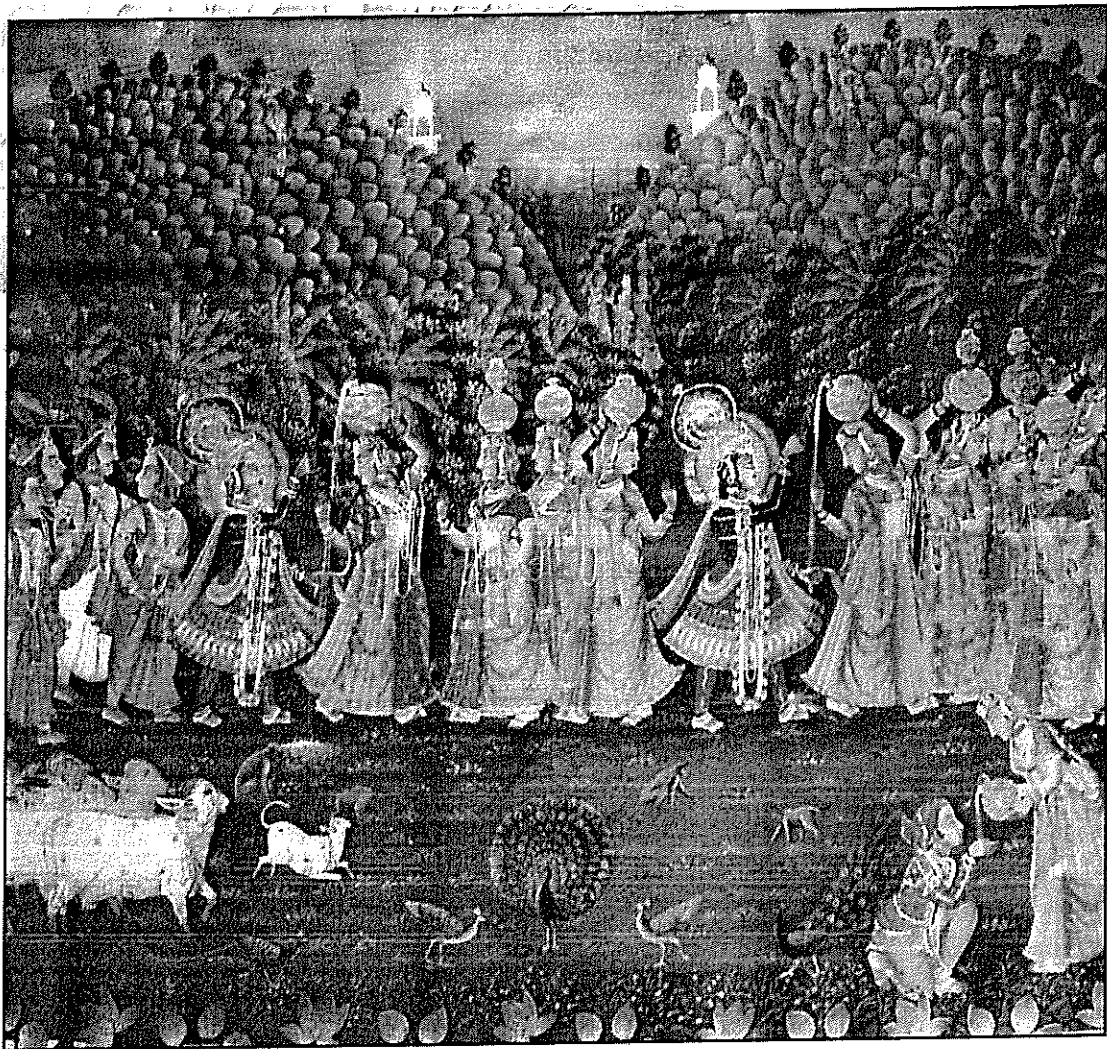
The temple is at the height of its cheer, glory and festivities. The way the tiny just born Shri Krishna was placed in a decorated gold 'Palna' (a crib) in Gokul, Shri Navnitpriyaji, the infant form of Shri Nathji is placed in a gold Palna the tiny Lord swings merrily in this Palna which symbolizes the heart of his devotees. This Palna festival continues for a fortnight. The love and elation for the Lord, flows from the hearts of the devotees as they come in thousands for the darshan of Shrinathji. He in all his splendour and gaiety gladly basks in the adorations and attention of his devotees like an emperor in his court.

The gaiety and cheer of this festival can be seen in Vraj, which is Shri Krishna's birth place. The Nand Mahotsav in Gokul is equally spendorous. But the beauty of this festival can be seen in every Vaishnav home throughout the country, as the whole country experiences a great feeling of devotion and love and celebrates the birthday of Shri Krishna.

BHADRAPAD

Two weeks after Janmashtami on Bhadrapad Sud Ashtami (eight^h day of the bright half of Bhadrapad) is celebrated Radhashtami or the birth anniversary of Shri Radha. Who is not just an eternal consort of Shri Krishna but a very part of Shri Krishna himself. From the eleventh day of the month for about twenty days is celebrated the festival of Daan. This festival is an expression of ***Daan Leela*** in Vraj when Shri Krishna asked for, or snatched the pots of milk and butter from the Gopis who went out to sell these in the villages around the Govardhan Hills.

On the twelfth day (Bhadrapad Sud Dwadashi) is celebrated Waman Dwadashi the day when the Lord incarnated in the form of Waman (a dwarf)



(Daan Lila)

ASHWIN

Practically the whole month is festive like the month of Shraavan. From the very first day Ashwin Sud Padwa (the first day of the bright half of this month), to the tenth day of **Vijya Dashmi**, is celebrated the festival of Nav Vilas or Navratri. This is festival which is an expression of Gopis love for Krishna. The Gopis during this time tried to please him and win him over in different ways and on the tenth day finally succeeded in winning His love. This sentiment is expressed in the celebration of the ten days. Then comes the festival of Sharadotsav on the fifteenth day of month (Ashwin Sud Punam) when Shri Krishna performed the **Maharaas** with the Gopis in Brindaban. The Shringaar on this day are silver gold shringaar. The dress the supplements surrounding the Lord are white and silver brocade. The jewellery is of diamonds and it gives an altogether magnificent beauty to the dark form of Shrinathji.

The preparations of Diwali and Annakoot Maha Mahotsav or Govardhan Yagna begin from Dessera onwards. The Annakoot festival being another very grand celebration in the Nathdwara temple. Diwali is the last day of the year according to the Hindu calendar. A traditional festival which is celebrated throughout India. In Nathdwara the festival is grander because of the age old custom of Govardhan Puja or Annakoot held the day after Diwali. The temple bustles with hectic activities and preparations from Dhan Teras and continues for five days Dhan Teras, Roop Chaturdashi, Diwali (the last three days of the darker half of Ashwin and continues well into the first two days of the month of Kartik) On the day of Diwali the festival has a special darshan of Hatdi (a small shop). This being an expression of Shri Krishna selling grocery to the Vrajwasis for their preparation of lovely delicacies they would prepare as an offering for Govardhan Puja. This Hatdi is set up in Ratna Chowk and Shri Navnitpriyaji appears here and gives exquisite darshan to his devotees.



(Raasotsav)

KARTIK

The day after Diwali-Kartik Sud Padwa is celebrated as Maha Mahotsav, Annakoot Mahayagna as it is called represents a revolution in the ideas of Hindu religion Shri Krishna has given us a new vision against superstitions and blind beliefs in religion practiced without understanding, also He has given us the principle of self surrender through His revolutionary ideas.

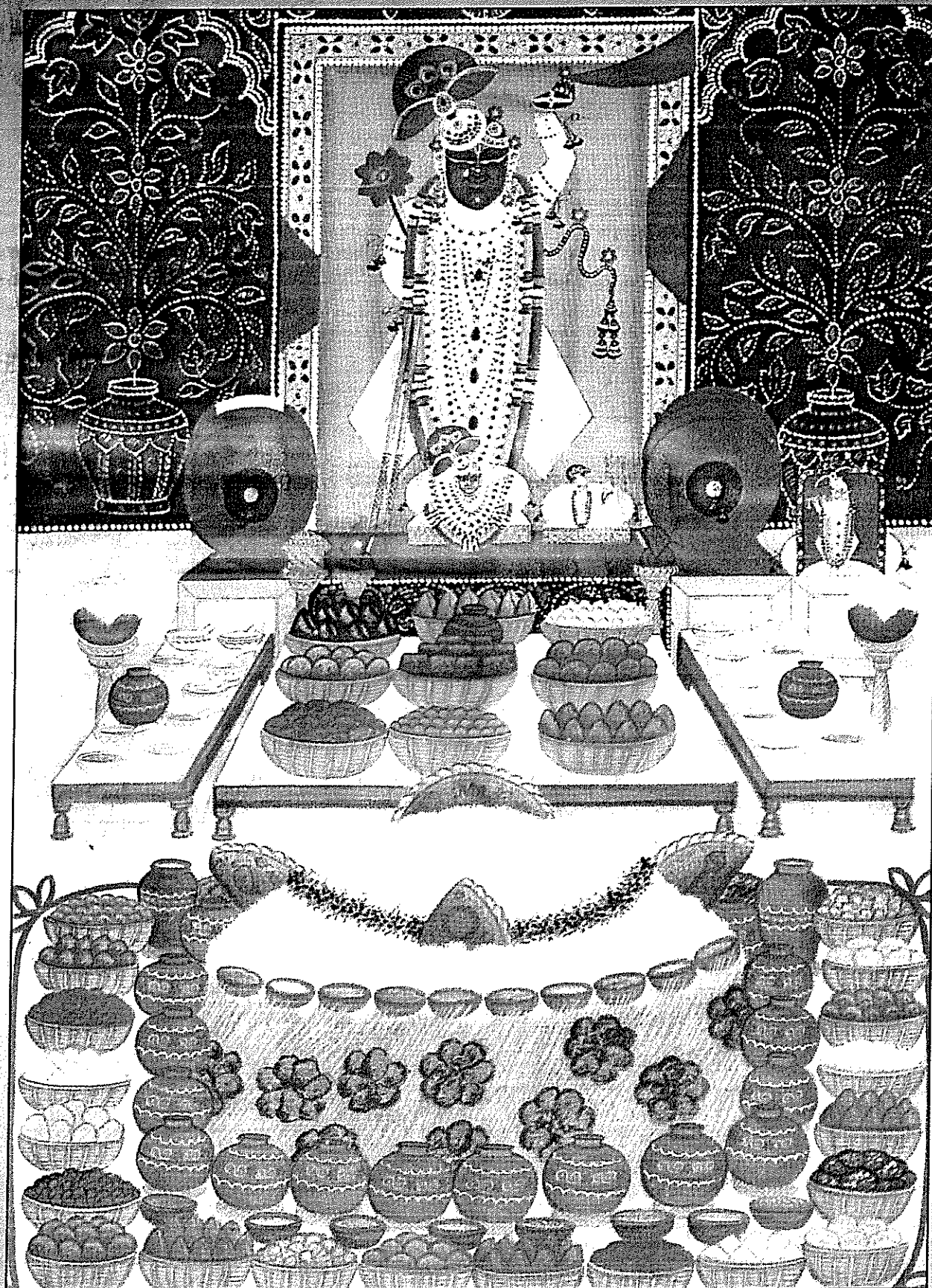
The temple bustles with activities. The mood is festive and the devotees throng in thousands to celebrate this festival every year. The Shringaar that adorns the Lord is splendid. The Lord is bedecked in jewels to match the festive mood. A huge fortress of food delicacies (Annakoot) is made as an offering to the Lord Govardhannath (Shrinathji Himself) the way it was offered in Dwapar Yuga. The same sentiment is still maintained in every Hindu temple throughout the country but is at its glorious best in Nathdwara. Shrinathji resplendent in all his festive finery enjoys the flow of his devotees love as also the great gourmet spread before him on this occasion.

The Lord being the enjoyer of the best in every respect, is offered Bhog which includes a variety of food in different tastes and styles. Each delicacy is carefully and aesthetically prepared and offered with great love. Prior to this offering of annakoot, govardhan puja is performed by making a replica of govardhan hills with cowdung. Cows are then worshipped in the Govardhan Chowk. giving an aura of Vraj Bhoomi to the temple. The ancient sentiment is relived and recreated by the glorious traditions creating a vision of Shri Krishna in his eternal bode. The darshan takes the devotees to new heights of bhakti and love. The crowd in this frenzy hails the Lord and the hearts are saturated with the very ideals of total surrender.

The grandeur with which the temple celebrates the festival is undescrivable; for it is a sublime expression of every hearts feelings. The special feature of the annkoot festival, is the adivasis, the bhils coming in thousands to plunder and loot the mounds of rice laid out in the Govardhan Chowk. This expresses that every being, irrespective of class or caste has an equal right to revel in the lord's graces.

The next day is celebrated as 'Bhai Dooj'. On the eighth day Kartik Sud Asthami is celebrated 'Gopasthmi' with the sentiment of Yashodaji who dressed her son as Gopal or cowherd and sent him to lead the cows in the forests of Brindaban.

The 11th day is celebrated as Dev Diwali or Prabhodhini Ekadashi celebrating the wedding of Shri Radha and Shri Krishna. Also the day marks the beginning of Seva pattern set for winter season.



(Annakoot)

MARGSHEERSH

On the ninth day of the dark half of this month Margsheersh Vad Navmi is celebrated the birth anniversary of Shri Vitthalnathji or Shri Gusainji as we commonly know him. The younger son of Shri Vallabhacharyaji he was the greatest exponent of the exquisite Seva in Pushti Marg and is revered on the same level as Shri Vallabhacharya himself. He inculcated the Raga, Bhoga and Shringar and set highest standards of Sewa in the Shrinathji temple. His mode of Sewa, and the love and care with which he performed it, pleased Shri Nathji immensely especially the way in which he celebrated Janmasthan. Shri Nathji therefore decided to reciprocate Shri Gusainji's love. On Gusainji's Birthday Shri Nathji spoke to the temple administrator and informed him that since Gusainji celebrated His birthday with so much love, He too would like to show His appreciation for Gusainji's love by celebrating his birthday ! Shri Nathji therefore ordered Jalebis (a type of sweet) to be prepared and offered to Him every year on this day.

The tradition of this offering of Jalebis is carried on to this day not only in the temple but even in every Vaishnav home following Pushti Marg.

PAUSH

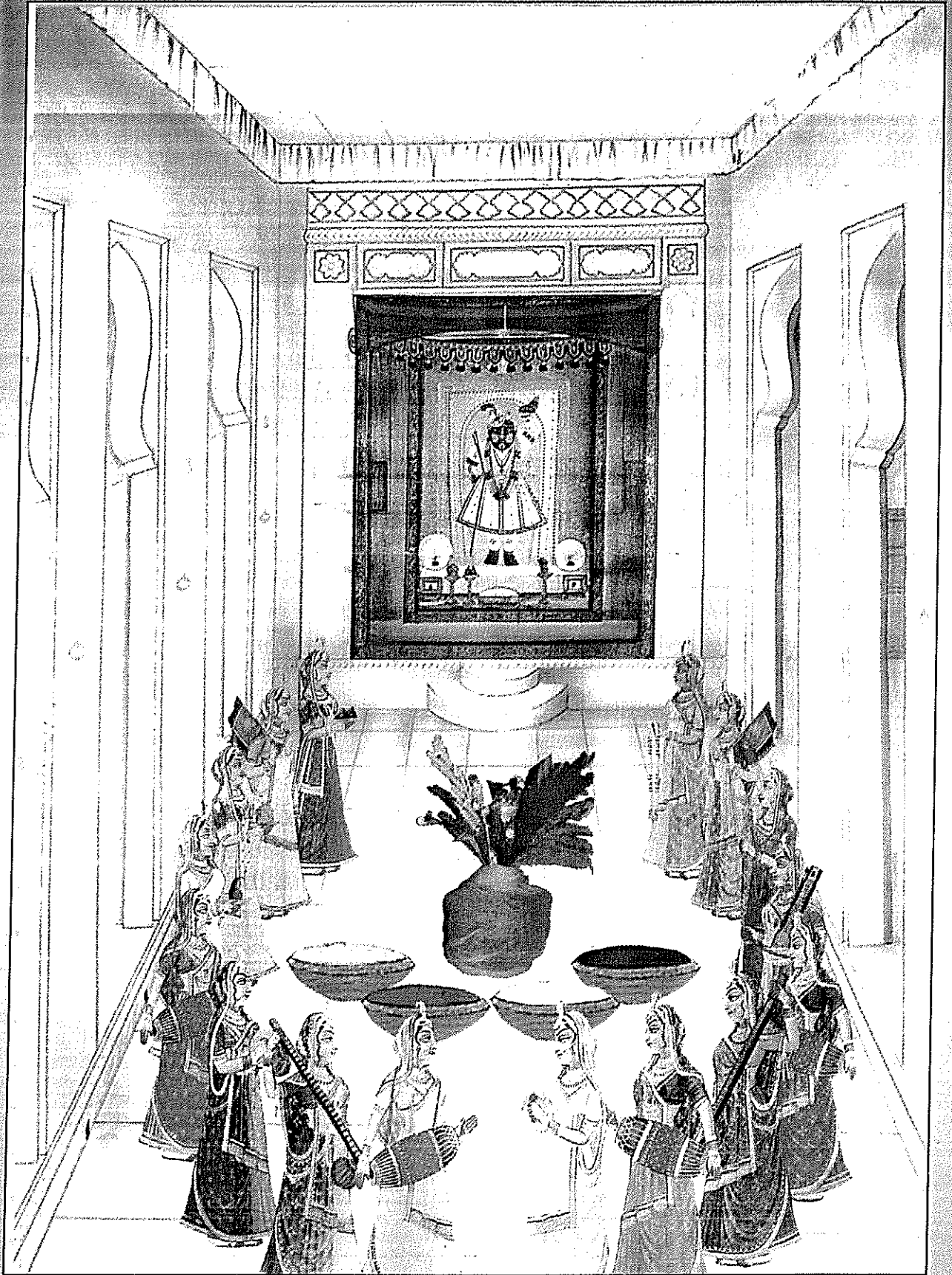
This month celebrates Makar Sankranti or what we know as the kite festival. The occasion is celebrated on the day when the sun enters the Northern Hemisphere or "Uttarayan". Special delicacies made out of "Til" or sesame seeds are offered and Shrinathji plays the game of 'Gedi-Dada' a village version of bat and ball.

MAHAA (MAGH)

The fifth day of the bright half of this month is celebrated as 'Vasant Panchmi' The advent of spring. The day is associated with the love of Shri Krishna and Shri Radha from this day till Holi for forty days. The color of abeel (white powder) Gulal (pink powder), the fragrance of sandal and saffron become prominent and so does the Shyam Rang or the dark color of Shrinathji Himself comes to prominence. The devotees drench themselves in the love and thus begin the festivities for Holi. The Shringar is in accordance with the mood of the festival. The attire is essentially accentuates the colors of Holi. Pichkari's or water pumps, bowls full of abeel, gulal are placed, symbolizing Shrinathji's playing of Holi.

On the seventh day of the dark half of this month (Mahaa Vad Saptami) is celebrated "Pastotsav". This is the day when Shri Nathji was seated and offered Seva in "Sat Ghara" in Giriraj. as the legend goes, Shri Gusainji was away from Giriraj. Shri Nathaji ordered his son Giridharji that he would like to come and live with them in Mathura and accept the Sewa from his family Shri Giridharji had a chariot made and Shri Nathji traveled to Mathura lived with Shri Gusainjis family (he had seven sons) at their family residence known as 'Sat Ghara'. Shrinathji arrived here on this day and was seated in the house. Shri Giridharji offered Sewa with utmost love and care and pleased the Lord in every way. The day is therefore celebrated as patotsav. As the day comes during the Holi celebrations the colors and revelry on this day are special. The 'Moja' covering the lord's feet in winters are kept away because it is summer there and the devotees get the darshan of the Lotus feet of the Lord. The festival is celebrated with great splendour and gusto.

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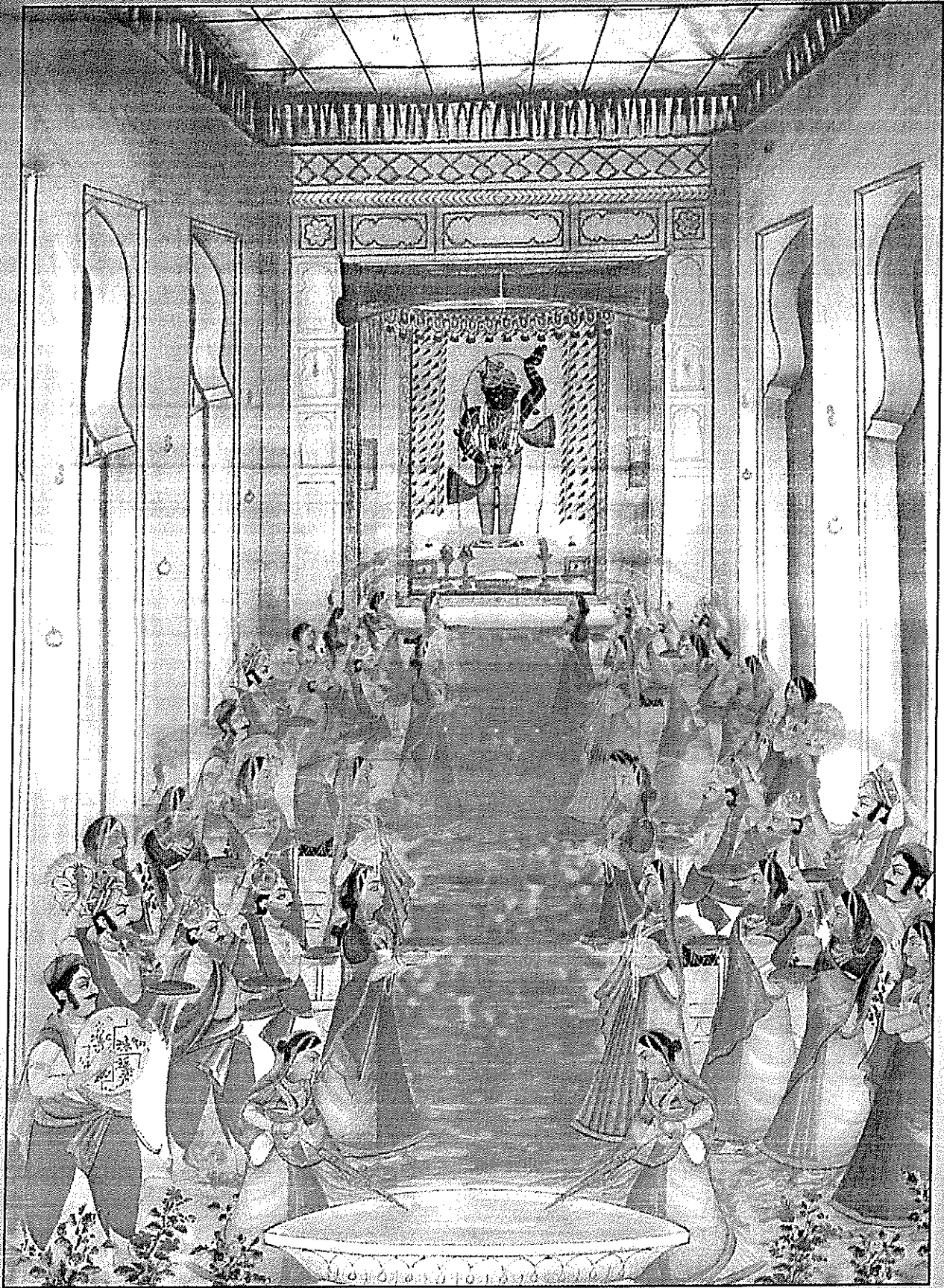
(Vasant Panchmi)

FALGUN

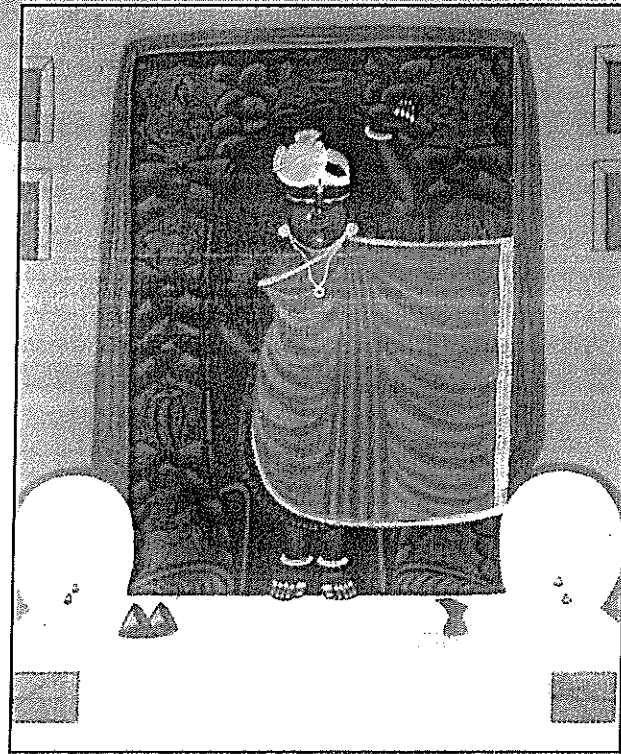
The falgun month denotes the vibrant color of Holi. The celebration which starts before forty days rises to a magnificent on the fifteenth day of the bright half of the month, when 'Holi' and 'Dolotsav' are celebrated.

Holi is one of the most liveliest of Indian festivals but the Holi celebrated in Vraj is the best. It is the festival which celebrates the eternal love of Radha and Krishna. There is dancing and singing and the atmosphere is replendant with colors. The festival is celebrated in the temples, at home and even on the streets. The same sentiment is expressed vividly with great cheer and splendour in Nathdwara. What begins as a slight sprinkling of colours forty days before gradually ends up with a wild frenzy of colors played on this day. His sakhis (Gopis) His devotees are engrossed in a lovely play of colors each trying to be victorious over the other. The thought, the word and the deed are synchronized and blended by just one word 'Love' in just one way color Basically this is a festival of love celebrated by colors and is quite unique in its own way better seen and experienced then expressed in wods. After the colours are sprinkled on the Lord the Mukhiyaji (the chief person performing the Sewa in the inner sanctum) throws colors on the thousands of devotees who are there for the darshan of the Lord. The whole sanctum is full of colors. The atmosphere, the devotees themselves Holi are drenched with the colors throw around. The lord and his devotees together play with colors, revel in an atmosphere full of love and cheer and celebrate the magic of Holi.

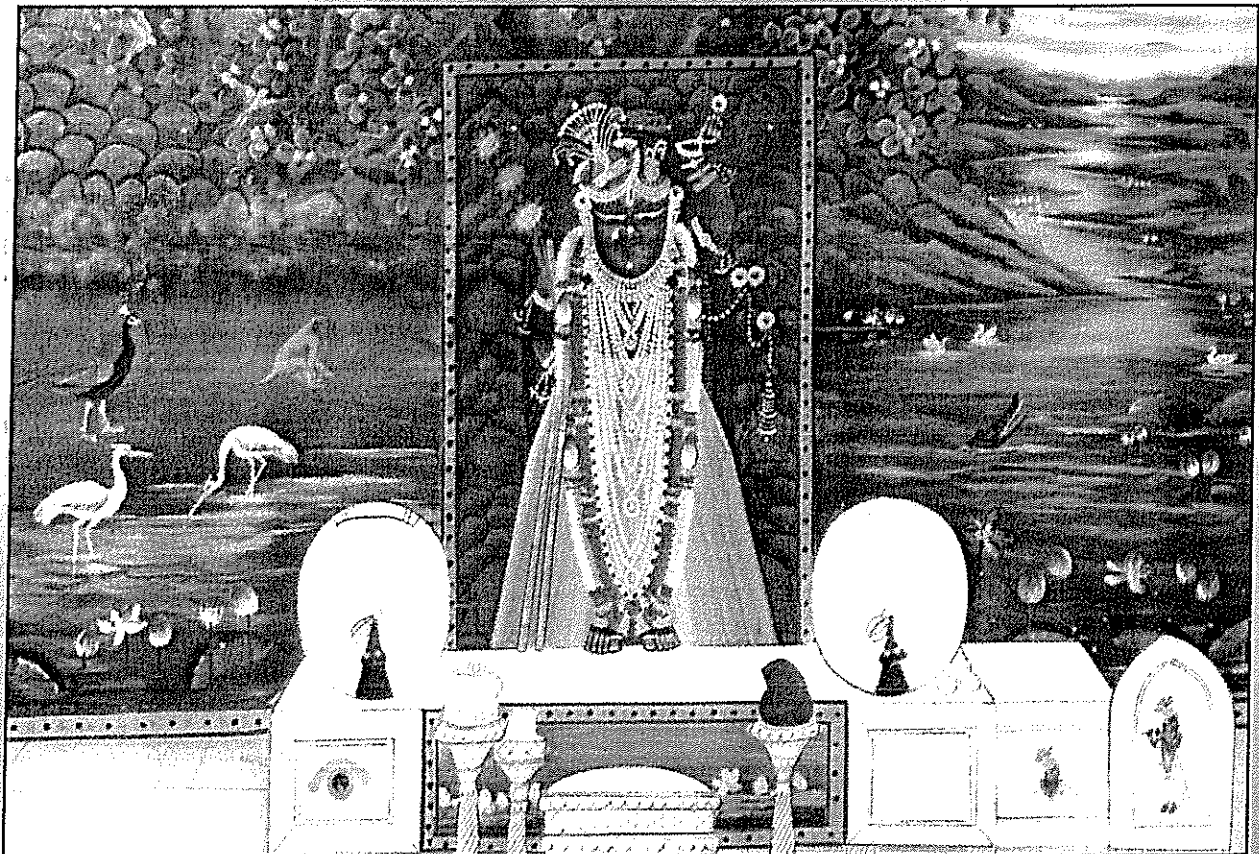
With all the celebrations and the normal routine Seva the phenomena called Shrinathji graces thousands of His devotees making each one His own by his will Generations have gone by and generations will come and Shrinathji will continue till eternity to bask in the love of his devotees. But even without the opulence of the paraphernalia Shrinathji will continue to grace his devotees and they in return will always love him and that is the mesmeric magic of Shrinathji.



(Holi Utsav)



(Mangla from Ashadh to Ashwin)



(Shringaar Darshan)